



Engaging with Multicultural YA Literature in the Secondary Classroom

Critical Approaches for Critical Educators

Edited by Ricki Ginsberg and Wendy J. Glenn

Engaging with Multicultural YA Literature in the Secondary Classroom

With a focus on fostering democratic, equitable education for young people, Ginsberg and Glenn's engaging text showcases a wide variety of innovative, critical classroom approaches that extend beyond traditional literary theories commonly used in K–12 and higher education classrooms and provides opportunities to explore young adult (YA) texts in new and essential ways. The chapters pair YA texts with critical practices and perspectives for culturally affirming and sustaining teaching and include resources, suggested titles, and classroom strategies. Following a consistent structure, each chapter provides foundational background on a key critical approach, applies the approach to a focal YA text, and connects the approach to classroom strategies designed to encourage students to think deeply and critically about texts, themselves, and the world. Offering a wealth of innovative pedagogical tools, this comprehensive volume offers opportunities for students and their teachers to explore key and emerging topics, including culture, (dis)ability, ethnicity, gender, immigration, race, sexual orientation, and social class.

Ricki Ginsberg is an Assistant Professor of English Education at Colorado State University, USA.

Wendy J. Glenn is Professor and Chair of Secondary Humanities at University of Colorado Boulder, USA.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>



Engaging with Multicultural YA Literature in the Secondary Classroom

**Critical Approaches for
Critical Educators**

**Edited by Ricki Ginsberg
and Wendy J. Glenn**



Routledge

Taylor & Francis Group

NEW YORK AND LONDON

First published 2019
by Routledge
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

and by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2019 Taylor & Francis

The right of Ricki Ginsberg and Wendy J. Glenn to be identified as the authors of the editorial material, and of the authors for their individual chapters, has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Ginsberg, Ricki, editor. | Glenn, Wendy J., 1970– editor.

Title: Engaging with multicultural YA literature in the secondary classroom / edited by Ricki Ginsberg, Wendy J. Glenn.

Description: New York, NY : Routledge, 2019. | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018055754 | ISBN 9780367147211 (hbk) | ISBN 9780367147228 (pbk) | ISBN 9780429053191 (ebk)

Subjects: LCSH: Multiculturalism in literature—Study and teaching (Secondary) | Young adult literature—Study and teaching (Secondary) | Reading (Secondary) | English language—Study and teaching (Secondary) | Multicultural education.

Classification: LCC PN1009.5.M84 E64 2019 | DDC 809/.89283071—dc23
LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018055754>

ISBN: 978-0-367-14721-1 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-367-14722-8 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-0-429-05319-1 (ebk)

Typeset in Galliard and Bell Gothic
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

For those who work tirelessly to promote the reading and teaching of diverse texts in classrooms, libraries, and bookstores—we are grateful for you and stand proudly by your side.

—R.G. and W.J.G.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>



Contents

Editors' Note: We intentionally avoid grouping chapters into topics or sections. We believe in the value and power of thinking in intersectional ways. The chapters are organized in a way that we hope will offer readers a fluid reading experience of connected ideas.

Introduction: The Critical Power and Potential of Multicultural Young Adult Literature	1
<i>Ricki Ginsberg and Wendy J. Glenn</i>	
1 Positioning Theory: Exploring Power, Social Location, and Moral Choices of the American Dream in <i>American Street</i>	11
<i>Jennifer Buehler</i>	
2 The Social Mind: Using Drama to Walk through Racism in <i>Out of Darkness</i>	22
<i>Patricia E. Enciso, Nithya Sivashankar, and Sarah Bradford Fletcher</i>	
3 Neoliberalism: A Framework for Critiquing Representations of the "Superspecial" Individual in <i>Marcelo in the Real World</i>	32
<i>Sean P. Connors and Roberta Seelinger Trites</i>	
4 The Dominant/Oppositional Gaze: The Power of Looking in <i>Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass</i>	42
<i>Emily Wender</i>	
5 Multiethnic/Multicultural/Multiracial Alloys: Reading the "Mixed" Experience in <i>Little & Lion</i>	53
<i>Cammie Kim Lin</i>	
6 Borders and Borderlands: Interrogating Real and Imagined Third Spaces Using <i>If I Ever Get Out of Here</i>	63
<i>Ricki Ginsberg</i>	



7	Understanding Racial Melancholia: Analyzing Race-Related Losses and Opportunities for Mourning through <i>American Born Chinese</i> <i>Sophia Tatiana Sarigianides</i>	74
8	Interrogating Happiness: Unraveling Homophobia in the Lives of Queer Youth of Color with <i>More Happy than Not</i> <i>Alyssa Chrisman and Mollie V. Blackburn</i>	83
9	Queer Reading Practices and Ideologies: Questioning and (Not) Knowing with <i>Brooklyn, Burning</i> <i>Ryan Schey</i>	93
10	Complicating the Coming Out Story: Unpacking Queer and (Anti)Normative Thinking in <i>Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda</i> <i>Angel Daniel Matos</i>	103
11	Theories of Space, Place, and Navigational Identity: Turning <i>Inside Out and Back Again</i> in the Exploration of Immigration <i>Wendy J. Glenn</i>	113
12	Teaching #BlackLivesMatter and #SayHerName: Interrogating Historical Violence against Black Women in <i>Copper Sun</i> <i>Chonika Coleman-King and Susan L. Groenke</i>	122
13	Critical Race English Education: Engaging with Hip-Hop, Resistance, and Remix in <i>All American Boys</i> and Viral YouTube Videos <i>Rachel L. Rickard Rebellino, Karly Marie Grice, and Caitlin E. Murphy</i>	132
14	Critical Language Awareness: Unpacking Linguistic and Racial Ideologies in <i>The Hate U Give</i> <i>Christina Marie Ashwin and Sara Studebaker</i>	142
15	Critical Comparative Content Analysis: Examining Violence, Politics, and Culture in Two Versions of <i>I Am Malala</i> <i>Amanda Haertling Thein, Mark A. Sulzer, and Renita R. Schmidt</i>	153
16	Deconstructing the Superhero: Interrogating the Racialization of Bodies Using <i>All-New, All-Different Avengers, Vol. I</i> <i>Francisco L. Torres</i>	162
17	Arts-Based Approaches to Social Justice in Literature: Exploring the Intersections of Magical Realism and Identities in <i>When the Moon Was Ours</i> <i>Christine N. Stamper and Mary Catherine Miller</i>	171

18	Afrofuturist Reading: Exploring Non-Western Depictions of Magical Worlds in <i>Akata Witch</i>	180
	<i>Rebecca G. Kaplan and Antero Garcia</i>	
	Conclusion: Recognizing and Speaking to the Challenges that Come with Courageous Teaching	191
	<i>Wendy J. Glenn and Ricki Ginsberg</i>	
	<i>Acknowledgments</i>	197
	<i>Editors and Contributors</i>	198
	<i>Index</i>	207



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>



Introduction

The Critical Power and Potential of Multicultural Young Adult Literature

Ricki Ginsberg and Wendy J. Glenn

Within public schools in the United States, more than half of students identify as people of color (NCES, 2016a), more than one-eighth are served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (NCES, 2016b), and more than half are eligible for free or reduced lunch (NCES 2016c). Further, in a national school climate survey (GLSEN, 2011), more than four-fifths of students who self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender reported that they were verbally harassed in the year prior due to their sexual orientation, and more than three-fifths reported being harassed because of their gender expression. Until recently, teachers have continued the tradition of selecting canonical, white, cisgender, heteronormative texts for instruction (Smolkin & Young, 2011; Stotsky, Traffas, & Woodworth, 2010). They describe a number of reasons for this adherence to traditional texts, including a lack of preparation and personal discomfort regarding the inclusion of multicultural young adult texts in their classrooms (Ginsberg, 2017; Thein, 2013; Wender, 2015; Wiltse & Boyko, 2015). In 2016, perhaps due to the rise of the #weneeddiversebooks campaign, the number of published titles that feature diverse voices has grown in the field. Teachers are increasingly using books that include these voices in their classrooms, and they seek critical practices and perspectives for teaching these texts in culturally responsive and affirming ways (Ginsberg, 2017).

MULTICULTURAL YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE: A DEFINITION

Within this text, we intentionally adopt an expansive definition of multicultural young adult literature. Our definition embraces all marginalized groups, and we feature texts that are critical of normative conceptualizations of (dis)ability, ethnicity, gender, immigration, race, social class, and sexual orientation (Hayn & Burns, 2012; Landt, 2006). Many of our chapters examine explicitly the intersectionality of these identities, and all focal texts were written expressly for and about young adults.



THE PURPOSES OF THIS TEXT

In this edited collection, we showcase a wide variety of innovative critical classroom approaches that extend beyond traditional critical theories commonly used in K–12 and higher education classrooms and provide opportunities to explore texts in new and essential ways. The critical approaches highlighted within this text can be used to instruct multicultural young adult texts in a time when studying such titles seems essential to fostering democratic, equitable education for young people living in an increasingly divided nation.

Each chapter focuses on a different critical approach and uses a different multicultural young adult text as an exemplar for the approach. Each chapter is carefully balanced and divided roughly into thirds:

1. Authors begin by providing foundational background information about their critical approaches to support teacher knowledge (and provide justification of the approach to administrators, as needed).
2. The approaches are applied to focal texts as exemplars of how this might look in the classroom. The chapters feature “See Also” boxes, in which authors suggest several other texts that can be analyzed using the critical approaches.
3. Authors end the chapters with specific, innovative pedagogical strategies (classroom activities, in particular), which offer students opportunities to think deeply about the critical approaches. Some of these strategies include whole-class and group activities, graphic organizers, etc. All author contributors provide pedagogical strategies that would also be applicable to existing texts in classrooms and book rooms.

It is our hope that readers will look to be inspired—by a critical approach that is of high interest or is particularly relevant to their students, by a text that meets their classroom needs, or by activities that will help their students think deeply about the world. The critical approaches herein have the potential to motivate the (re)design of year-long or unit plans, or they might be used within a smaller section of a unit. As former secondary English teachers, we know that our colleagues in classrooms are smart and attuned to the lives of their students. We thus respect the fact that teachers will adapt, adjust, expand, and abbreviate the critical approaches, textual analyses, and pedagogical activities within the chapters to align with their classroom needs.

A ROADMAP

We begin by sharing Jennifer Buehler’s “Positioning Theory: Exploring Power, Social Location, and Moral Choices of the American Dream in *American Street*.” Buehler’s chapter challenges students to explore the lived experiences of urban and immigrant youth in relation to cultural narratives about the American Dream in Ibi Zoboi’s (2017) *American Street*. Using the lens of

positioning theory, along with drama-based writing and role-playing activities, students are invited to examine how characters' identities—and our own—are shaped by social roles and locations; how individuals negotiate relationships, power dynamics, and opportunity structures based on the positions they hold; and how both immigrant and urban youth find sources of strength as they navigate cultural worlds and the spaces between worlds. Positioning theory has the potential to equip students with analytical tools to develop a deeper understanding of who has access to opportunity in America, who does not, and why.

Patricia E. Enciso, Nithya Sivashankar, and Sarah Bradford Fletcher's "The Social Mind: Using Drama to Walk through Racism in *Out of Darkness*" centers on Ashley Pérez's (2015) novel *Out of Darkness*, which provides a storyline that allows students to deepen their understanding of societal and institutional formations of dehumanization in fiction and reality. Using this novel as the focal text, this chapter argues that readers' entry into and understanding of characters' simmering hatred and violence rely on their experiences with real world social divisions, especially racism and sexism, along with their capacity to recognize how authors reconstruct hate and exclusion in storyworlds. The authors employ Alan Palmer's theory of "social minds" to suggest how teachers could construct a practice of critical engagement that can facilitate students' attention to textual details, while also accounting for their experiences crossing back and forth between the social divisions in their worlds and historical storyworlds.

In "Neoliberalism: A Framework for Critiquing Representations of the 'Superspecial' Individual in *Marcelo in the Real World*," Sean P. Connors and Roberta Seelinger Trites use neoliberalism as a critical approach. In its emphasis on individualism and free-market economics, the economic theory of neoliberalism assumes that talented individuals thrive when they are freed from governmental regulations. This is premised on a second assumption: namely, that individuals compete on a level playing field and succeed as a result of their own unique talents and abilities. In this way, neoliberalism erases the role that social constructs, such as race, gender, class, and ability, play in privileging some groups of people and oppressing others. This chapter presents a three-part framework for identifying and critiquing neoliberalism and its attendant ideologies in multicultural young adult fiction. The authors apply the framework to Francisco X. Stork's (2009) *Marcelo in the Real World*. By examining the stance that the novel takes in regard to institutions, individualism, and interdependence (as opposed to independence), the authors demonstrate how the novel resists neoliberal ideologies in favor of a more progressive, inclusive worldview.

Emily Wender's "The Dominant/Oppositional Gaze: The Power of Looking in *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass*" explores how theorizing dominant and oppositional gazes allows students to read multicultural young adult literature in transformative ways. Using Meg Medina's (2013) *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass*, Wender links strategies designed to help students recognize dominant/oppositional gazes in their own worlds and lives with those designed to foster literary analysis, which includes transferable sets of

questions that help student readers notice characters' experiences of being looked at, the ways characters act in response to gazes, and the various positions of characters, both those that adopt the dominant gaze and those that counter them. Pointing to other young adult novels that provide rich explorations of the oppositional gaze, this chapter offers one approach for helping readers analyze and appreciate literary perspectives that challenge the simplified stories that have kept certain groups in power.

In "Multiethnic/Multicultural/Multiracial Alloys: Reading the 'Mixed' Experience in *Little & Lion*," Cammie Kim Lin uses the metaphor of an alloy—two or more metals, which, when combined, form a new metal that is often stronger than the sum of its parts—to explore the experiences of multiracial, multiethnic, and multicultural characters. Seeing mixed individuals as alloys suggests complex, unified identities, rather than a combination of parts that can be divided (e.g., half Asian, a quarter Black, and a quarter Jewish). The alloy lens draws on Maria Root's work with multiracial and multiethnic participants (whom she describes as "a new racial group"), as well as the fields of intersectionality and critical multiculturalism. In addition to offering a reading of *Little & Lion* through an alloy lens, the author highlights instructional practices that engage adolescent readers in the development and application of an alloy lens themselves. By developing and reading through this lens, readers inhabit the perspectives of the alloys, fostering an ability to border-cross and to see from multiple perspectives.

Ricki Ginsberg's "Borders and Borderlands: Interrogating Real and Imagined Third Spaces Using *If I Ever Get Out of Here*" draws from Anzaldúa's (2012) borderlands and encourages readers to consider the potential for expanding and interrogating notions of borders and borderlands. Borderlands are particularly relevant when applied to stories that explore contexts that exist between two seemingly bounded spaces, as seen in the case of the focal text, Gansworth's (2015) *If I Ever Get Out of Here*. The approach allows teachers and students opportunities to critique socially constructed, traditional binaries and borders, such as those that exist within conceptions of race, sexuality, religion, or gender. Using the focal text, readers are provided with classroom activities that allow students to (re)consider the application of border studies to political issues, including Indigenous lands and tribal sovereignty, and the application of borderlands to their lived experiences with group memberships. Students are invited to consider whether the construction or imagination of borders is a positive and/or negative force on conceptualizations of identity and culture.

In "Understanding Racial Melancholia: Analyzing Race-Related Losses and Opportunities for Mourning through *American Born Chinese*," Sophia Tatiana Sarigianides describes how racial melancholia names and explains the psychological effects of systemic racism via whiteness that is coerced onto the lives and bodies of people of color in the United States. An extension of Freud's theorizations of melancholia, racial melancholia helps readers understand how psychological losses of cherished facets of minoritized identities are socially

coerced onto groups but felt and experienced as an individual's failure to conform to society. As such, this concept works very well to explain the complex sets of losses experienced by the main characters in Yang's (2007) *American Born Chinese*. Though challenging to teach, students understanding this concept will recognize the impossibility of "fitting in" for racially minoritized individuals like Asians in the US, and begin to see possibilities for pushing back against such processes of socially coerced losses centered on racism and other exclusions.

Alyssa Chrisman and Mollie V. Blackburn, in "Interrogating Happiness: Unraveling Homophobia in the Lives of Queer Youth of Color with *More Happy than Not*," introduce Ahmed's (2010) notions of happy objects and proximity to unhappiness to interrogate the value of happiness in Silvera's (2015) novel *More Happy than Not*. The authors focus on key scenes to illustrate happy objects, such as family, heterosexual love, others' happiness, and truth, and invite teachers to guide students to write about these concepts in relation to their lives and to discuss them through close readings of the novel. They then challenge teachers and students to consider the importance of being close to unhappiness as a way of working for political consciousness and action, again, in their lives and in the book. Using an innovative classroom activity, Chrisman and Blackburn underscore the power of proximity to unhappiness and what students know and can do when they feel freedom to be unhappy.

Ryan Schey's "Queer Reading Practices and Ideologies: Questioning and (Not) Knowing with *Brooklyn, Burning*" draws on queer theories to outline how teachers can cultivate queer reading practices as part of students' literary analysis repertoires. Queer theories generally understand gender and sexuality as socially constructed categories, focusing on the production of "normal" identities and the possibilities for fluid movement across categories or the suspension of such categories. Queer reading practices, then, focus on ways that students and teachers can question genders and sexualities in and through a literary text and explore their own assumptions about (reading) these identities. This chapter uses Brezenoff's (2011) *Brooklyn, Burning*, a text that foregrounds queer ideologies and thus serves as an accessible entry point for learning this lens, and focusing on ways to question the text's representation of characters and gender. Teachers can leverage the novel's queer elements to help students develop queer reading practices.

In "Complicating the Coming Out Story: Unpacking Queer and (Anti) Normative Thinking in *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda*," Angel Daniel Matos advocates for the importance of implementing analytical frameworks that emphasize the role of fluidity and privilege in critiques of the YA coming out narrative. It invites educators to consider the importance of approaching coming out narratives as malleable and subject to change, and considering how their narrativizations are inflected by factors such as a protagonist's class, gender, race, cultural background, and social upbringing. The chapter calls for the need to reiteratively consider how changes in sociocultural circumstances affect the intervention that a coming out narrative represents. This chapter

addresses the state of the YA coming out narrative in the field and then examines how Albertalli's (2015) *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* reinforces and complicates understandings of the coming out narrative. Suggestions are provided for discussing these matters in the classroom and recommendations for further exploring how contemporary queer narratives address the coming out process.

Wendy J. Glenn's "Theories of Space, Place, and Navigational Identity: Turning *Inside Out and Back Again* in the Exploration of Immigration" uses Thanhha Lai's (2011) *Inside Out and Back Again* as a focal text and draws upon theories of space, place, and navigational identity to encourage students and teachers to examine how identities are constructed in the in-between spaces we experience as we move (literally and figuratively) from one location to another. Using place-based pedagogies that honor the prominence of situated communities in the creation, maintenance, and revision of our individual ways of knowing, seeing, and doing, the chapter presents classroom activities designed to encourage a peeling back of the many layers of influence on our identities.

Chonika Coleman-King and Susan L. Groenke's "Teaching #BlackLivesMatter and #SayHerName: Interrogating Historical Violence against Black Women in *Copper Sun*" reports that while physical violence against black bodies is steeped in history, the resurgence of images of beatings and killings of black children and adults has spurred the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, an expression of frustration, rage, and protest regarding the failure of systems of the state to protect and value the lives of black people. BLM activists have called on teachers to educate students about the BLM movement's central beliefs and practices. Coleman-King and Groenke draw on the work of BLM activists and critical theorists to describe a small-group, dialogic literature circle activity to teach Sharon Draper's (2008) historical fiction novel *Copper Sun* in the secondary English language arts and/or history classroom. The literature circle strategy engages students in close reading of and dialogue about *Copper Sun* to consider what and how historical forms of violence were used to enforce and uphold slavery.

In "Critical Race English Education: Engaging with Hip-Hop, Resistance, and Remix in *All American Boys* and Viral YouTube Videos," Rachel L. Rickard Rebellino, Karly Marie Grice, and Caitlin E. Murphy consider the images and stories of black death in the media and the subsequent rise of the #BlackLivesMatter movement and how several YA authors have written stories that engage with police brutality against young black men at the same time as they demonstrate the power of activism and the role young people play as activists. Young people themselves have added to these conversations through creative works disseminated through new media platforms. The chapter places one such book, Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely's (2015) *All American Boys*, in conversation with one such work of art, Todrick Hall's visual album *Straight Outta Oz* (2016). The authors discuss and detail activities that demonstrate how using Critical Race English Education, informed by critical theories of

hip-hop literacies and youth participatory culture, facilitates an understanding of the historic layers of oppressive ideologies and representations of American youth activism within the focal texts.

Christina Marie Ashwin and Sara Studebaker's "Critical Language Awareness: Unpacking Linguistic and Racial Ideologies in *The Hate U Give*" considers how white teachers maintain racialized discrimination against their students of color when they uphold the dominant yet problematic standard language ideology, the belief that standardized English is more communicative, grammatical, and correct than vernacular dialects, such as African American Vernacular English, which are often spoken by students of color and their families. Standard language ideology has been linked to dominant racial ideologies that privilege and maintain white dominance. Critical language awareness and its pedagogies guide teachers to work with students to discuss and disrupt these dominant and erroneous racialized beliefs about language. Ashwin and Studebaker provide critical language awareness theory and critical language pedagogical strategies to inspire and guide their instruction regarding language variation and racism today.

Amanda Haertling Thein, Mark A. Sulzer, and Renita R. Schmidt, in "Critical Comparative Content Analysis: Examining Violence, Politics, and Culture in Two Versions of *I Am Malala*," address how adaptations of general market memoirs for youth audiences are increasingly present in the YA market but how these texts often allow few opportunities for youth to explore the complexities of race, gender, social class, politics, and violence. The authors examine two versions of Malala Yousafzai's memoir, *I Am Malala* (Yousafzai & Lamb, 2013; Yousafzai & McCormick, 2014), about her experiences as a Pakistani girl who stood up for education and was shot by the Taliban. They illustrate activities grounded in Critical Comparative Content Analysis that engage students in comparisons of general market and YA versions of Yousafzai's memoirs, focusing on peritextual features, structure and organization, and narrative voice. They illustrate how such activities shed light on how the YA memoir deemphasizes the violence Malala experienced and her resistance to Western culture, while emphasizing her interest in American culture and in peace processes related to education.

In "Deconstructing the Superhero: Interrogating the Racialization of Bodies Using *All-New, All-Different Avengers, Vol. 1*," Francisco L. Torres gives educators tools to critically discuss and deconstruct the effects of popular culture, specifically the superhero genre, on youth using critical theories of race. Focusing on the graphic novel *All-New, All-Different Avengers, Vol. 1: The Magnificent Seven* (Waid, Kubert, & Asrar, 2016), the author highlights how even when people of color take on the superhero role in comics, the way their bodies are positioned by society at large is still a product of their race or skin color rather than their empowerment. One way of engaging with such racialization is to encourage youth of color to create their own heroes, centered on their lived realities and experiences, that talk back to the effects of racialization and injustice more generally. This chapter explores how encouraging youth,

particularly youth of color, to create stories in which they are able to imagine, discuss, and embody resistance, can help them see themselves as agents of change in an oppressive system that seeks to make people of color docile and define them primarily by their race.

Christine N. Stamper and Mary Catherine Miller's "Arts-Based Approaches to Social Justice in Literature: Exploring the Intersections of Magical Realism and Identities in *When the Moon Was Ours*" connects YA texts to magical realist canonical works taught in many secondary classrooms using the focal text of Anna-Marie McLemore's (2016) *When the Moon Was Ours*, specifically discussing how the novel utilizes magical realism to discuss trans bodies. The genre of magical realism, often characterized by fluidity, intangibility, and the abstract, provides an entrance for teachers to discuss gender and sexuality, topics similarly fluid and intangible. McLemore's use of Latinx traditions provides an avenue for students to have intersectional conversations about magical realism, trans bodies, and Latinx culture. Specifically, the authors utilize arts-based pedagogies to connect the lived experiences of students to the marginalizations of characters. As students engage with elements of magical realism in the approach, applying fluidity and intangibility to their art (and thus their interpretation of gender and sexuality), they engage with deeper understandings of LGBTQ identities and the text itself.

Rebecca G. Kaplan and Antero Garcia write "Afrofuturist Reading: Exploring Non-Western Depictions of Magical Worlds in *Akata Witch*." Readers have described *Akata Witch* as the "Nigerian Harry Potter." Far beyond a change in setting, Okorafor's (2011) YA novel makes Western notions of magic, conflict, and resolution unfamiliar. Recognizing both the liberatory possibilities of fantasy novels and their all-too-frequently whitewashed cast of characters and tropes, this chapter offers opportunities to expand ontological thinking through using an afrofuturist lens to examine *Akata Witch*. The authors explore this lens as an approach for reading multicultural literature and discuss key concepts to draw out within *Akata Witch* as a pathway toward imagining new possibilities for action within the real world. The afrofuturist lens connects contemporary YA texts to past authors, artists, and musicians; teaching about and through afrofuturist readings of texts and the contemporary world links discussions to a lineage of revolutionary black art and activism.

We conclude by speaking across chapters and offering a call to action for this work. We recognize and speak to the challenges that might come with courageous teaching by providing resources for teachers and teacher educators who might be hesitant to take up this work or face resistance in their schools or larger communities. It is our hope that educators who open this text will feel comfortable and confident to test, adapt, re-envision, and respond to the critical approaches offered by the contributors. We believe that their approaches celebrate the affordances of a changing student population, counter hegemonic practices, and have the potential to support the critically thinking and action-minded young people we have met (and been inspired by) in secondary schools.

REFERENCES

- Ahmed, S. (2010). *The promise of happiness*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Albertalli, B. (2015). *Simon vs. the homo sapiens agenda*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Anzaldúa, G. (2012). *Borderlands/La frontera: The new mestiza* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books.
- Brezenoff, S. (2011). *Brooklyn, burning*. Minneapolis, MN: Carolrhoda Lab.
- Draper, S. (2008). *Copper sun*. New York, NY: Atheneum.
- Gansworth, E. (2015). *If I ever get out of here*. New York, NY: Arthur A. Levine.
- Ginsberg, R. (2017). 'What right do you have to teach this to us?': White teachers negotiate dilemmas of multicultural young adult literature in urban classrooms. Retrieved from DigitalCommons@UConn. (1435)
- GLSEN. (2011). *The 2011 school climate survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth in our nation's schools*. Report of the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED535177.pdf>.
- Hayn, J. A., & Burns, S. M. (2012). Multicultural adolescent literature: Finding the balance. In J. A. Hayn & J. S. Kaplan (Eds.), *Teaching young adult literature today: Insights, considerations, and perspectives for the classroom teacher* (pp. 135–153). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Lai, T. (2011). *Inside out and back again*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Landt, S. M. (2006). Multicultural literature and young adolescents: A kaleidoscope of opportunity. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 49(8), 690–697.
- McLemore, A. (2016). *When the moon was ours*. New York, NY: Thomas Dunne.
- Medina, M. (2013). *Yaqui Delgado wants to kick your ass*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press.
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). (2016a). *Digest of education statistics, 2016, table 203.50*. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cge.asp#.
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). (2016b). *Digest of education statistics, 2016, table 204.30*. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgg.asp#.
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). (2016c). *Digest of education statistics, 2016, table 204.10*. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16_204.10.asp#.
- Okorafor, N. (2011). *Akata witch*. New York, NY: Speak.
- Pérez, A. H. (2015). *Out of darkness*. Minneapolis, MN: Carolrhoda Lab.
- Reynolds, J., & Kiely, B. (2015). *All American boys*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.
- Silvera, A. (2015). *More happy than not*. New York, NY: Soho Teen.
- Smolkin, L., & Young, C. (2011). Missing mirrors, missing windows: Children's literature textbooks and LGBT topics. *Language Arts*, 88(3), 217–225.
- Stork, F. X. (2009). *Marcelo in the real world*. New York, NY: Scholastic.
- Stotsky, S., Traffas, J., & Woodworth, J. (2010). Literary study in grades 9, 10, and 11: A national survey. *Forum: A Publication of the ALSCW*, 4. Retrieved September 15, 2017 from http://alscw.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/forum_4.pdf.
- Thein, A. (2013). Teachers' resistance to LGBT literature and issues. *Language Arts*, 90(3), 169–180.
- Waid, M., Kubert, A., & Asrar, M. (2016). *All-new, all-different avengers, vol. 1: The magnificent seven*. New York, NY: Marvel.
- Wender, E. (2015). Felt tensions: Preservice teachers read Sherman Alexie's *An absolutely true diary of a part-time Indian*. *The ALAN Review*, 42(2), 45–56.

- Wiltse, L., & Boyko, T. (2015). “Cause it has to happen”: Exploring teachers’ resistance to LGBT literature and issues in a teacher inquiry group. *Learning Landscapes*, 9(1), 285–302.
- Yang, G. L. (2007). *American born Chinese*. New York, NY: Macmillan.
- Yousafzai, M., & Lamb, C. (2013). *I am Malala: The girl who stood up for education and was shot by the Taliban*. New York, NY: Little, Brown.
- Yousafzai, M., & McCormick, P. (2014). *I am Malala: How one girl stood up for education and changed the world*. New York, NY: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers.
- Zoboi, I. (2017). *American street*. New York, NY: Balzer + Bray.

Positioning Theory

Exploring Power, Social Location, and Moral Choices of the American Dream in *American Street*

Jennifer Buehler

Stories of the American Dream are central to American identity. One of our core cultural beliefs is that America is the land of opportunity; everyone can make it if they work hard enough. References to the American Dream appear throughout popular culture, from rags-to-riches stories of individuals who achieve wealth through hard work and ingenuity to bootstraps stories of immigrants. The concept of social mobility—that is, the notion that individuals can ascend to a higher-class status than the one they were born to—is central to our national ideology. Through the American Dream narrative, we tell the world who we as a country believe ourselves to be.

But there is a darker side to the American Dream. While some Americans do rise from humble origins to achieve financial success, the playing field is not level. Government policies ensure this. For example, throughout the 20th century, federal laws and local ordinances were designed to create and maintain racial segregation in neighborhoods, which limited African-Americans' access to home ownership, jobs, and quality education (see, for example, Coates, 2014 and Rothstein, 2017). It is impossible to consider the American Dream without also considering the social location of the person trying to achieve it.

Ibi Zoboi explores these ideas and more in *American Street* (2017). On one hand, the novel presents a classic immigration story: main character, Fabiola Toussaint, struggles with the tension involved in acclimating to a new home in Detroit while holding on to parts of Haitian culture she finds essential to her identity. Her struggle is more intense because she must undergo it alone. When her mother is detained at an immigration center in New Jersey, Fabiola has no choice but to continue on to Detroit where an aunt and three cousins are waiting for her. In the midst of a strange new world, Fabiola relies on spirit guides, called *lwas* and drawn from Haitian *vodou*, to help her make sense of the moral choices that confront her. The plot hinges on the question of what Fabiola is willing to sacrifice in order to be reunited with her mother. Meanwhile, she wonders how to reconcile the “empty houses, and broken buildings,

and wide roads that lead to nowhere and everywhere” (p. 247) with the good life she expected to find in America.

Alongside Fabiola’s struggle, Zoboï reveals the struggles of Fabiola’s Haitian-born aunt, Matant Jo, who came to America looking for work and opportunity; her cousins, the Three Bees, whose father was murdered in Detroit when they were children; and others in the community, including drug dealers and a homeless man. At key moments, Zoboï provides her main characters with backstories. Presented in the form of first-person interludes, these backstories allow characters to speak in their own voices about who they are and what they have lived. Readers are thus challenged to view characters’ behaviors as reflections of the history they have inherited as well as their hopes and dreams.

POSITIONING THEORY

Because much of what Fabiola experiences in America contradicts with what she has been told, she must construct a new story about what one must do to claim power and agency here. Part of learning to navigate her environment involves figuring out how to interpret the behaviors and motivations of people around her. Students perform similar acts of interpretation when they read literature. Positioning theory provides them with tools to do this work critically.

Drawn from social psychology and discourse analysis, positioning theory begins with the premise that we are always making sense of our own and others’ lives in terms of storylines that tell us what to expect in social situations. Storylines help us recognize and interpret the parts we and others are playing in everyday interactions.

As Harré and his colleagues have argued (e.g., van Langenhove & Harré, 1999), during conversational interactions, people use narratives or “storylines” to make their words and actions meaningful to themselves and others. They can be thought of as presenting themselves as actors in a drama, with different parts or “positions” assigned to participants in the conversation. Positions made available in this way are not fixed, but fluid, and may change from one moment to the next depending on the storylines through which participants make meaning of the interaction (Barnes, 2004). Storylines and subject positions may be drawn from everyday life (e.g., routines of classrooms, courtrooms, or churches) or cultural repertoires (e.g., roles such as damsel in distress, gangster, or superhero). We live our lives in relation to storylines; that is, “strips of life are usually lived stories for which told stories already exist” (Harré, 2012, p. 198).

If storylines are present in everyday conversation, then acts of positioning occur when people use speech acts to reveal beliefs about others’ personal characteristics, merits, or flaws (e.g., “He’s such a hard worker”) or their own status in comparison to others (e.g., “We only shop at Whole Foods”). Positioning also happens when people locate their own or others’ experiences within a moral context (e.g., “Good guys finish last”). How people are

positioned in any situation depends on community values, personal characteristics, and the histories of individuals (Barnes, 2004).

Because positions carry associated rights and duties, such as the right to be heard or the duty to care for others, positioning is linked to power. Being positioned in a certain way carries obligations or expectations about how one should behave and/or constraints on what one may meaningfully say or do (Barnes, 2004). Positioning is a social and interactive process in that participants in a conversation position others while simultaneously positioning themselves. Once one individual is positioned by another, the initial positioning can be challenged (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999). The process of establishing or relinquishing power in social interaction hinges on the way individuals interpret the meaning of their own and others' speech acts.

Positioning matters because it has moral implications. Speech acts are used to rank, sort, and judge. People can be positioned in terms of their individual attributes and with regard to moral orders (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999). The way we use language locates people and groups as trusted or distrusted, with us or against us (Moghaddam & Harré, 2010). In acts of positioning, we reveal our beliefs about others as right or wrong, virtuous or flawed, deserving of reward or punishment.

Since positioning theory is concerned with storylines and roles, it provides a useful lens for analyzing literature. The following teaching plan consists of three parts: 1) introducing students to core concepts of positioning theory; 2) engaging students in drama-based activities focused on characters and events in *American Street*; and 3) having students apply positioning theory through community-based research.

INTRODUCING POSITIONING THEORY

To get comfortable with positioning theory's core concepts, students may find it helpful to bring a series of questions to their reading of the novel. These questions, presented in Figure 1.1, suggest theory-driven ways of interpreting speech acts.

The following examples illustrate positioning in *American Street* as seen in characters' thoughts, first-person interludes, scenes of dialogue, and references to the American Dream.

Characters' Thoughts

When Fabiola meets her three cousins in person—Chantal, the oldest, and the twins, Primadonna and Princess—she positions herself as mature and responsible, just like Chantal, the good student with the big SAT score who now attends community college: “Everything she’s said sounds like she has a good head on her shoulders. I decide then and there that we will be the second set of twins in this family” (p. 18).

Concept	Questions
Positioning: Using language to assign oneself and/or others to roles, accompanied by corresponding rights and duties, in an unfolding storyline.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How does a character’s positioning of self or others help explain the logic of the character’s behavior or worldview?• How does my social location shape my interpretation of the text? How and why might others interpret the text differently?
Storylines: Narratives drawn from cultural repertoires and the rituals of everyday life that illuminate the roles we play in social interaction and the social, cultural, and historical patterns we are part of.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What storylines have I been exposed to in my family and community?• What storyline am I drawing on as I interpret characters’ actions and motivations?
Speech acts: What we accomplish in social interaction by the things we say and do. Through speech acts, we make direct and indirect claims about ourselves and others; we establish roles that may change as the context or situation changes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What words or phrases are characters using to position themselves in relation to others?• What is the effect of those words or phrases on others who are involved in the interaction?

■ **FIGURE 1.1** Questions for exploring core concepts in positioning theory

Fabiola’s self-positioning corresponds to the way she is positioned by Pri—as a good girl different from the rest of them: “Ma, don’t be so hard on her. You finally got the little good girl you prayed for. She looks like she’s on that straight and narrow” (p. 17).

First-Person Interludes

In the interlude, “Princess’s Story,” Pri tells the reader how she and her sisters were positioned as “other” when they were children: “They thought just ’cause we were Haitian, we didn’t bathe, we wore mismatched clothes, and we did voodoo” (p. 45). Pri and her sisters reject that positioning and construct new positions for themselves:

I don’t remember who came up with it first, but Chantal is the brains, Donna is the beauty, and me, I’m the brawn. Three Bees. Biggest, baddest bitches from the west side. Nobody, I mean nobody, fucks with us.
(p. 46)

By repositioning themselves as big and bad, Pri and her sisters claim the right to intimidate and dominate those who threaten them. In doing so, they rewrite the power dynamic in their school and neighborhood.

Later, Chantal's interlude ("Chantal's Story") shows how the position she constructs for herself is more nuanced—both a reflection of her dreams and a response to her environment:

I try to walk a path that's perfectly in between. On one side are the books and everything I have to do to make myself legit, and on the other side are the streets and everything I have to do to stay alive out here.

(p. 117)

Pri's and Chantal's interludes show how acts of positioning can only be fully understood in relation to context and personal history.

Scenes of Dialogue

When Fabiola is getting to know Kasim, who later becomes her boyfriend, she asks if he reads books. Kasim hears a storyline drawn from Detroit and takes offense at being positioned in it: "You're asking me if I'm literate? [. . .] I'm sorry, Fab. I just don't like it when girls do that. Either they think I'm swimming in cash money, or they think I'm dumb as fuck" (p. 101).

Fabiola tries to smooth things over by drawing on storylines from *vodou* to position Kasim as different from Donna's boyfriend, Dray: "There are guys like Dray in Haiti. [. . .] We call them *vagabon*, drug dealers. Maybe some of them like to study, but they love money more" (p. 102). These exchanges show how positioning is linked to power. Participants use speech acts to affirm or refute how they are seen and understood by others.

References to the American Dream

When Aunt Jo tells Fabiola what motivated her husband, Uncle Phil, to buy their home in Detroit ("Matant Jo's Story"), she invokes a cultural narrative that connects home ownership to the American Dream: "He had dreams, you know. That's why when he saw this house for sale, on the corner of American Street and Joy Road, he insisted on buying it. [. . .] He thought he was buying American Joy" (p. 57).

When Dray explains how he came of age in those same streets ("Drayton's Story"), he invokes a different narrative about American life: "If my pops and his pops before him been fighting all their lives to just fucking breathe, then what's there for a little nigga to contemplate when somebody puts a gun in his hand?" (p. 314). The position Dray claims as a drug dealer is his response to being dealt an empty hand.

Pri invokes both narratives when she explains how she and Donna got their names ("Princess's Story"):

Ma named us Primadonna and Princess 'cause she thought being born in America to a father with a good paying job at a car factory and a house

and a bright future meant that we would be royalty. But when our father got killed, that's when shit fell apart.

(p. 44)

Pri's account shows how she replaces one storyline about life in America (the possibility of rising from humble origins to become royalty) with another (shit falls apart).

DRAMA-BASED ACTIVITIES

While positioning theory is useful for analyzing characters and scenes, text-based analysis may not lead students to interrogate why they respond to characters and situations as they do. Drama-based activities provide space for students to examine how social location shapes their meaning-making.

The following activities—*Complete the Image*, *Voices in the Head*, and *Conscience Alley* (University of Texas at Austin, 2018)—give students ways to explore their own and others' positioning.

Complete the Image

This activity invites students to dramatize an interaction between characters by creating a series of two-person images based on an event, theme, or situation.

How It Works

Invite students to sit in a circle. Ask two volunteers to stand in the middle, shake hands, and freeze their entire bodies, including their facial expressions. Have the rest of the group process what they see by asking, *What is going on in this moment between these two people? What makes you say that? What else could it be?*

Then invite a volunteer to come up and tap out one of the frozen characters while the other person stays frozen. The volunteer creates a new frozen image by placing the self in a new position with the frozen person. Invite the rest of the group to make meaning, again, of what they see.

After initial ideas are shared, invite students to start over, this time creating images that play out silently as a new scene unfolds. One by one, students subtract and add themselves to the two-person image to make a new image as quickly as possible, taking turns to involve as many students as they can.

Connections to Positioning Theory and American Street

Because images change as characters interact, *Complete the Image* illustrates how positions are fluid as characters position themselves and react to being positioned by others. Since the activity is done silently, it shows how positions

can be asserted, rejected, and negotiated through facial expressions and body language.

The images that students create could represent scenes from the novel in which power, manipulation, and/or deception is at stake, such as Fabiola agreeing to work with Detective Stevens in exchange for getting her mother out of detention (pp. 87–92) or Fabiola attempting to entrap Dray in a drug deal (pp. 263–270). Images could represent moments that Fabiola thinks of as allegorical (e.g., standing at the crossroads [pp. 110–112], journeying to the underworld [pp. 181–186]). Images could also be created to represent themes, such as opportunity, sacrifice, loyalty, and betrayal.

Debrief the Activity

Discussion could focus on how facial expressions and body language communicate attributes (e.g., strength, weakness, cunning), emotions (e.g., hope, despair, fury), and states of mind (e.g., indecision, resolve) and how these inform the positions that characters take up in the moment. Students could then step back and reflect on how who they are shapes the way they view who is deserving of respect, especially when moral choices are at stake. What storylines are they drawing on as they interpret right and wrong? How might emotion or state of mind cause their interpretation to change?

Voices in the Head

This activity asks students in a frozen scene to attend to both body language and speech as they and their classmates voice a character's inner thoughts.

How It Works

Ask students to create a statue, frozen image, or tableau. Once the image is set, place a hand on the shoulder of one person within the image and ask the student to speak the character's inner thoughts. Or, hold a hand over the character's head and invite other students to speak an inner thought for the character. Ask the group, *What might this character be thinking? What else might this character be thinking?*

The activity can be extended past a single moment to encompass a longer improvised scene. In this variation, when the teacher freezes the scene, the students who are watching speak the inner thoughts of the characters, adding context or subtext to the action until someone unfreezes the scene.

Connections to Positioning Theory and American Street

By emphasizing thought processes, *Voices in the Head* invites students to explore how positions are informed by the unspoken perceptions and motivations of individuals.

Voices in the Head is useful for exploring moments in *American Street* when characters are processing what is happening, such as when Fabiola discovers the truth about her cousins' connection to the drug death of a white girl at a party in Grosse Pointe Park (pp. 208–213). This new information changes the way Fabiola views her cousins and aunt, her past life, and her current circumstances. *Voices in the Head* creates a space to examine how characters rationalize the positions they are in and the positions they will take up going forward.

Debrief the Activity

Discussion could explore how characters change their own and others' positions based on new information. How is power connected to knowledge or lack of knowledge? Students could then step back and ask how their lived experiences shape their perception of characters and events. How might someone whose experience is different interpret the characters differently? How does social location influence the conclusions one draws about others?

Conscience Alley

This activity invites students to explore multiple facets of a character's choice within a specific dilemma. *Conscience Alley* is used to analyze the range of issues a character may be concerned with when making a major decision.

How It Works

Invite the group to form two lines facing each other. If there are two sides of a conflict (e.g., *go to war*; *don't go to war*), have each row represent an opinion, and invite students to stand on the side they would like to argue, working to keep roughly the same number of people on each side. Create an alley between the rows in which a person can easily walk.

Next, a volunteer takes on the role of a character and walks slowly down the row. Each student shares arguments the character might have heard (e.g., advice, warnings) or lines that could be inside the character's head (e.g., fears, beliefs, concerns). After walking the alley, ask the character to share how she/he/they feel about the decision to be made.

Variations include having students in the rows speak one at a time or overlapping their voices and mixing up viewpoints so that the character is confronted by a range of contrasting opinions.

Connections to Positioning Theory and American Street

With its emphasis on having participants publicly state their points of view, *Conscience Alley* can be used to make the connection between position and beliefs more visible.

Conscience Alley is ideal for exploring moments in *American Street* when a character is under pressure to make a decision or take action. Fabiola faces several of these moments (e.g., whether to inform Detective Stevens of her cousins' illegal activities). Other characters faced these moments in the past (e.g., Aunt Jo's decision to leave Haiti when she was young; Chantal's decision to attend community college instead of going to Stanford).

Debrief the Activity

Discussion could focus first on why different classmates took the positions they did. If *Conscience Alley* is used to place students in positions that are unfamiliar or uncomfortable (e.g., a lifelong African-American resident of Detroit, parents of white teens in Grosse Pointe Park, a member of law enforcement), discussion could explore how it felt to take up a position that was not one's own. What was that like? What challenges were involved?

Students could then discuss whether changing positions changes the way one interprets people, issues, or situations. Does changing positions change one's worldview, values, or sense of agency? If so, how? What can we gain from changing positions, even if only as a thought experiment? How is our sense of our own position different afterwards?

APPLYING POSITIONING THEORY TO FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

Positioning theory equips students to critically analyze *American Street*, but it can also equip them to analyze stories of the American Dream. Students can extend their thinking from the novel to real life by conducting community-based research interviews.

Start by having students analyze how family members position themselves within the community and their family tree. What narratives or storylines do they use to explain their family's struggles or successes? Do students agree or disagree with these storylines? What other storylines could explain their family's experience?

Students can extend this inquiry to neighbors. How do different people on the same block tell the same or different stories? What storylines do they draw on, and how do they position themselves and others? Students should strive to interview people who occupy different social locations and thus may have different stories to tell about opportunity in America.

Afterwards, students can ask what role social location plays in people's interpretations of their lived experiences. How aware are people of their location in a power structure? What do storylines and acts of positioning show about their awareness and/or blind spots?

Students could add another layer by researching the history of public policy and applying it to their neighborhood. For example, during the post-war

housing boom of the 1950s, who was allowed to buy a house on their street and who was not? Who could get a federally backed mortgage and who could not? Within this policy context, students could read and interpret their interviews more critically. Does their understanding change when they read the interviews against policies designed to protect the interests of whites and marginalize people of color?

Students could then discuss the impact of this research on their thinking. Do they see themselves, their neighborhood, or American cultural narratives differently based on the stories they have collected and the history they have uncovered? If so, how? What can they see now that they did not before?

CONCLUSION

When students get better at seeing complexity in literature, they become more equipped to see complexity in the world around them. By using positioning theory and drama-based activities to explore *American Street*, students come away with more nuanced ways of thinking about the novel and the American Dream.

We can use positioning theory in everyday life to become more aware of the gap that separates the lives people aspire to in America from the lives they are able to attain. We can become more critical of the storylines we have internalized, and we can commit to working together to build a more just and equitable world.

SEE ALSO

Bausum, A. (2009). *Denied, detained, deported: Stories from the dark side of American immigration*. Washington, DC: National Geographic.

Bausum's nonfiction account of the history of American immigration calls attention to past policies of repression and exclusion. These stories equip students with tools to interrogate how "undesirable" immigrants have been and continue to be positioned in the American Dream story.

Tan, S. (2007). *The arrival*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

Tan's wordless graphic novel depicts immigration as strange and magical. Use *The Arrival* to further explore how immigrants cope with loss, respond to obstacles, and find strength as they position themselves in a new world.

REFERENCES

- Barnes, M. (2004). *The use of positioning theory in studying student participation in collaborative learning activities*. Session presented at the Annual Meeting of the Australian Association for Research in Education, 28 November–2 December 2004,

- Melbourne, Australia. Retrieved from www.aare.edu.au/publications-database.php/4082/the-use-of-positioning-theory-in-studying-student-participation-in-collaborative-learning-activities.
- Coates, T. (2014, June). The case for reparations. *The Atlantic*, 54–71. Retrieved from www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/.
- Harré, R. (2012). Positioning theory: Moral dimensions of social-cultural psychology. In J. Valsiner (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of culture and psychology* (pp. 191–206). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Moghaddam, F., & Harré, R. (2010). Words, conflicts and political processes. In F. Moghaddam & R. Harré (Eds.), *Words of conflict, words of war: How the language we use in political processes sparks fighting* (pp. 1–30). Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.
- Rothstein, R. (2017). *The color of law: A forgotten history of how our government segregated America*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.
- University of Texas at Austin. (2018). *Drama-based instruction: Activating learning through the arts*. DBI Network. Retrieved from http://dbp.theatredance.utexas.edu/teaching_strategies.
- van Langenhove, L., & Harré, R. (1999). Introducing positioning theory. In R. Harré & L. van Langenhove (Eds.), *Positioning theory: Moral contexts of intentional action* (pp. 14–31). Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Zoboi, I. (2017). *American street*. New York, NY: Balzer + Bray.

The Social Mind

Using Drama to Walk through Racism in *Out of Darkness*

Patricia E. Enciso, Nithya Sivashankar,
and Sarah Bradford Fletcher

Ashley Pérez's (2015) novel, *Out of Darkness*, opens with a poetic and chilling survey of destruction in an East Texas town where more than 300 children died on March 18, 1937, as the result of a school gas line explosion. Speaking for white townspeople, the narrator recounts their heavy emotional trudge from disbelief to grief to anger to "a need. Someone to blame. Someone to make pay" (Pérez, 2015, p. 2). A young black man, and central character, Wash Fuller, is in their sights.

Based on a true historical event, *Out of Darkness* posits the undocumented but plausible reality of three communities—white oil company laborers and their families, Mexican families, and black families—coexisting and interacting within and across pathways circumscribed by a history of white supremacy exacted through racial epithets, intimidation, and violence. Born to Mexican parents, Naomi Vargas, the focal character, is forced to move to New London with her white stepfather, Henry, and twin step-siblings, Beto and Cari, who are perceived to be white. Haunted by her mother's death and her history of being sexually abused by Henry, Naomi finds living in close quarters with him painfully oppressive. He rejects her language, identity, and free will. When she leaves the confining spaces of their home, Naomi finds no relief at school, where she is the object of ridicule and desire by The Gang—her schoolmates, who express a host of sexist, racist, and classist viewpoints, all of which appear to be part of the air they breathe. Naomi seeks refuge in the woods and creeks near her home where she first encounters Wash, with whom she eventually falls in love.

Using multiple, alternating narrators, Pérez illuminates Naomi and Wash's efforts to form a family with Cari and Beto on the edges of the town and in the woods, out of Henry's and others' sights. Surrounding them, however, is Henry's growing bitterness and spite, The Gang's jealousies and suspicions, and Wash's family's fears that he is becoming too forthright with white school administrators. When the gas line explodes, destroying hundreds of lives, the town leaders seek blame and mob-fueled revenge. Naomi and Wash's plans

to flee New London's bigotry and hate bring the star-crossed lovers and their antagonists together in a heartbreaking conclusion.

Pérez's Printz Honor, Américas, and Tomás Rivera award-winning novel has the potential to deeply engage readers in the emotional, historical, and political experiences of violence associated with the intersections of racism and sexism and thereby support them in examining how binaries and associated assumptions of supremacy continue to haunt our everyday lives. We know, however, that many students and teachers are not well practiced in facilitating dialogue that centers racial and sexual violence in youth lives (Sassi & Thomas, 2008; Winn, 2013). African-American, Latinx, and LGBTQ students, in particular, are regularly excluded from naming their experiences (Thomas, 2009). How, then, might teachers construct a practice of critical engagement so that all students will read with attention to textual details and viewpoints as they also experience crossing back and forth between the social divisions in their worlds and fictional storyworlds?

We argue that readers' entry into and understanding of characters' simmering hatred rely on their experiences with real world social divisions along with their capacity to recognize how authors reconstruct hate and exclusion in storyworlds. We propose that a literary theory of social minds (Palmer, 2011) offers a useful framework for teachers and students as they describe and analyze formations of social divisions, in particular racism, in fictional and actual worlds. Although the word *minds* suggests intellectual and cognitive formations of meaning, we understand, as does Palmer, that social minds are formed through the many ways we see, feel, hear, and hold social life in our bodies, in relation with one another across actual and fictional experiences.

In order to support students' discoveries of social minds in fiction and everyday life, we describe a dramatic inquiry (Edmiston, 2013) pedagogy which begins with choral reading and continues with small-group word and phrase selection and an activity often called "word carpet" (Rowlands, 2014). In our adaptation, this activity involves guiding students to walk in pairs across a "carpet" of words as they voice the social mind of characters whose words express attitudes and perceptions along a spectrum—from seemingly innocuous, unquestioned exclusions to sharply targeted threats. We developed and implemented this pedagogy with predominantly white pre-service teachers, surmising that many of them would move quickly through long narrative passages and likely miss the emotional weight of *The Gang's* words or bypass them based on their discomfort with the implications and, for some, familiarity. Entering the world of *Out of Darkness* is difficult, and yet the story is incomplete, even misread, if readers are unable to grasp the depth of hate permeating the town's history, characters' perspectives, and contemporary people's daily lives.

A THEORY OF SOCIAL MINDS

The theory of social minds, as proposed by Alan Palmer (2011), is a literary analytic tool that examines "those aspects [of the story] that are outer,

active, public, social, behavioral, evident, embodied, and engaged” (p. 211), in short, descriptions and dialogue that gesture toward “the way things are” in a particular place and time. Social mind refers to the collective consciousness of a group of people who occupy the same intersecting spaces. Palmer (2011) argues that “fictional social minds [. . .] are central to our understanding of fictional storyworlds. This is because real social minds are central to our understanding of, and ability to operate in, the actual world” (p. 197). Thus, our understanding of social life in the actual world enables or constrains our insights into the social minds depicted in a novel, and likewise, our experiences with literary worlds may influence how we interpret and refine our perceptions of social minds in actual life.

Taking Palmer’s work further, Bekhta (2017) identifies “we-narration” as a means of representing the social mind in the text as a collective subjectivity. In we-narratives, “a group [. . . who] narrates [. . .] is also a character, consistently using the first-person plural pronoun for self-designation and self-reference” (Bekhta, 2017, p. 165). Bekhta (2017) suggests that the we-group functions as “witness,” a “revolutionary collective,” or a “whole town” (p. 165) by virtue of it “act[ing] as a plural subject or we-group, capable of forming shared group intentions and acting on them jointly” (Margolin in Bekhta, 2017, p. 169). In six chapters entitled “The Gang,” Pérez creates a we-narrative through which Naomi’s peers express their attitudes about her body, ethnicity, race, and sexuality, often referencing the history of exclusion, resentment, and dehumanization they have built as a social group. Through The Gang’s we-group narration, readers encounter the raw tones and textures of hatred that have shaped the collective group consciousness of white supremacy and misogyny in New London for generations.

DRAMATIZING INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE STORYWORLD

“The Gang” chapters serve as vivid entry points to language and viewpoints that many young adults might consider to be the remnants of past generations’ ideologies, while other readers would recognize the group’s attitudes and language as all too contemporary. How do teachers plan for and navigate their students’ diverse lived experiences as they ask them to slow down and feel the weight of these words? Discussion, alone, can become stilted or silencing for many students as they try to articulate their particular viewpoints without the support of a common reference point or experience (Edmiston, 2013; Edmiston & Enciso, 2002; Medina, 2004). Drama pedagogy engages individual perspectives while directing the whole group to form a public, collective landscape of possible images and relationships, one articulated by many voices from their multiple perspectives. In addition, as a specific focal event or idea in the storyworld is embodied, even minimally, it becomes possible to slow down reading so that selected words and phrases accrue deeper layers of history and meaning across fictional and actual worlds.

Medina and Wohlwend (2014) define dramatic experience in literacy education as “the threading of improvisational make-believe worlds that get

constructed through writing, responding to texts, and/or acting and [. . .] produced at the intersection of everyday experiences and imaginative practices. [. . .] In dramatic experiences [. . . whatever is] discussed and created within and around an improvisation is essential to how knowledge gets constructed” (p. 28).

Edmiston (2016) describes this movement between worlds in terms of dialogic inquiry:

[I]n dramatic inquiry pedagogy, all participants are invited to take up multiple perspectives often in non-naturalistic ways (e.g., with everyone speaking as if they are the thoughts of one character) and may move back and forth between those perspectives as all participants dialogue both as themselves and as if they are different people. Additionally, all are positioned to dialogue from those perspectives, with one another, with the teacher, and with themselves and thus over time dialogically inquire into a topic. The inquiry is dialogic, in Bakhtin’s sense, because people are able to enter more fully into the consciousness of others and dialogue from those positions through their use of embodied dialogic imagination. (p. 335)

Teachers facilitate learning through dramatic inquiry by planning for readers’-actors’ improvisations and movement into and outside of a storyworld (Edmiston, 2016; Medina & Wohlwend, 2014; O’Neill, 1995). As Edmiston (2003) writes, “Whereas the everyday world is a ‘single’ reality, a drama world has a ‘doubled’ reality because we experience it happening in both imagined and everyday space-times simultaneously” (p. 223). With each deliberate movement between worlds, readers experience and expand upon the story’s language, author’s structuring of social minds, and the perspectives readers have formed in their own lives. This doubly engaged reading challenges youth and teachers to shift back and forth between textual features and their interest in and critiques of characters’ actions, voices, and emotional journeys. In drama practice, this shifting can become visible and directed by teachers, so that readers-actors are able to focus on and develop a 360-degree view of particular images, language, and relationships.

In the following section, we describe a sequence of reading experiences intended to engage our students in dialogic and critical awareness of the relationships among readers in the real world and readers-actors in the fictional world. In their improvisation with these words, students were encouraged to struggle with the sound and feel of a collective social mind in the text as they performed the words using their actual voices.

PEDAGOGY: WALKING WITH “THE GANG”

Our aim with each phase of the pedagogy was to engage students in reflective reading as we also activated a critical mindset about the meaning of words and

social relations in the story and their own lives. Pat facilitated the pedagogy in Sarah's class on young adult literature, designated for pre-service English Education majors. All of the students had completed their reading of the book and were ready to return to a deeper analysis of the story's context and implications.

Circle Reading: The Prologue

Pat began the dramatic inquiry with a circle reading of the final two paragraphs of the Prologue, which set the stage for the grief and anger expressed by the white townspeople. This pedagogy works best with a poetic text in which short lines and punctuation tighten the focus on particularities of time, relations, sensations, objects, and images, for example: "There are not enough caskets to go around. A call goes out for carpenters. [. . .] For the next three days, alone or in numbers, families mourn their children and their neighbors' children. Voices grow thin and hoarse from singing. Throats tighten. Consolation falters" (Pérez, 2015, p. 2).

A circle reading means that everyone stands in a circle, shoulder to shoulder, with a text in hand. Participants are instructed to read to a punctuation point; then the next person reads; and so on. Depending on the size of the group, the text may be read several times, so everyone has a chance to read once. The read around can be repeated a second time, with an emphasis on emotional words (e.g., caskets, mourn, tighten). When someone hears a word that is especially evocative, they repeat it out loud. The repetition creates an echo effect and sense of communality in the reading experience, while intensifying readers' attention to how language serves to structure feeling and imagery.

Frame and Distancing

In dramatic inquiry, participants often focus on a problem together as if they are experts on the concern presented to them (Edmiston, 2013). As experts, they are given the task not only to create an event but also to step outside of their creation to assess whether it is likely to be effective or it meets their goal. The doubled world experience makes it possible for students to enter into the framed drama world, while maintaining a critical distance from which they can examine their own lives, emotional boundaries, and projections into their futures as teachers.

Before continuing with the group's inquiry, Pat suggested that participants could work as experts who were planning an interactive exhibit on racism for a local museum. Given the group members' extensive reading and expressed concerns about inequality, she noted that they would be excellent advisors on this project. As the facilitator of this pedagogy, Pat asked the group if they would agree to work as if they were testing out a new approach to an exhibit that would condense the time frame and emotional effect of living in a highly racist, misogynistic society. Group members would ask themselves, as they

went along, whether the experience (and potential museum attendees' experiences) felt productive or harmful in some way.

Along with the dramatic frame as a critical distancing device, students need a tool to signal their personal discomfort and potential unwillingness to experience racist and misogynistic language as expressed by the gang. We recommend a signal called fist-to-five, described in a Teaching Tolerance Guide on discussing racism (www.tolerance.org/magazine/publications/lets-talk). As participants engage with each pedagogical move, they voluntarily signal, or the whole group may be asked to stop and signal with their hands, whether they are very uncomfortable (fist), uncomfortable and need help before moving on (one finger) and so on with five fingers indicating readiness to move on and be fully engaged. We are especially aware of the importance of this tool for students of color and women who should not be expected to engage with racist and misogynistic language unless they have control over their participation. The conversation about everyone's different signals will be important for understanding how we experience "the social mind" and how we can respond to racism and misogyny from our different standpoints.

Highlighting Social Minds

Pat distributed pages from the six The Gang chapters, giving each pair of experts/students one page to review as if they were preparing materials for an interactive exhibit on racism and sexism. To focus the task, Pat listed five ways The Gang's social mind and we-narration might be evident as shared group intentions indicating a collective group consciousness of in-group solidarity aimed at out-group social exclusion:

Relations: pronouns and verbs; for example, "we had all heard"; "we craned our necks" (Pérez, 2015, p. 32)

Descriptions: bodies, clothing, ways of doing and being; for example, "clothes from five years ago" (Pérez, 2015, p. 33) and "poor as all get-out" (Pérez, 2015, p. 59)

Projections (subjunctive mode): could, might, should, maybe; for example, "Without her, we'd have nothing to talk about but football." (Pérez, 2015, p. 59)

Dialogue: direct or overheard; for example, "We had all heard Miranda harping for months about how Naomi was greasing up the school." (Pérez, 2015, p. 182)

Actions: subject and object; for example, "poison the whole town" and "rub that calico" (Pérez, 2015, p. 33)

As they searched for evidence of New London youth's social mind, the experts/students discovered a range of familiar and unfamiliar dehumanizing forms of language.

To add another layer of critical analysis to their reading, Pat asked them to use light blue, orange, and red markers to indicate the emotional heat of the language. Words or phrases reflecting what characters would recognize as matter of fact or commonly heard words were highlighted in blue, more sharply targeted or vivid words and phrases were highlighted in orange, and directly threatening words were highlighted in red.

Creating the Word Carpet

After experts/students completed highlighting words, Pat asked pairs to select six phrases, representing all three intensities described above. They were asked to transfer these phrases, using the same colors, to 8.5 x 11 sized paper. Pat asked everyone to use a large font size so the words could be easily read from standing height. These pages would form the basis of the dramatic-based experimental interactive exhibit. As they gathered their pages, the experts/students were asked to do another round of selection with their words, considering which ones would be experienced by exhibit attendees as cool, sharp, and hot. Cool words were placed in a six-foot-long pathway on the floor, next to pathways for sharp and hot words. In this way, experts/students created three parallel paths that resulted in a “carpet” of words to walk over.

As they created the word “carpet,” experts/students had to shift from the characters’ viewpoint to a contemporary viewpoint, which initiated new conversations among them about what words could be experienced as more or less dehumanizing, racist, and sexist. Speaking about how racialized and sexualized language is coded or directly stated is not a typical dialogue among students, and yet, the act of selecting and placing words in these three categories generated thoughtful awareness of and debate about the ways even the use of pronouns (us, we) could be experienced as hot. Figure 2.1 represents about half of the words selected by experts/students.

Walking through Words and Worlds

Up to this point, experts/students focused on written language while discerning and discussing its implications for different audiences, including themselves. The next phase of the pedagogy asked them to do a simple task, but one that demanded an embodied presence with one another and the words of Pérez’s gang.

Pat asked the pairs to select who would be named A and B. After their selection, Pat told them that As would guide Bs through the pathway. As would speak the words on the pathway in a stage whisper so that their speaking voice would not drown out the voices of others. Bs would close their eyes and be guided by As. In this way, the words could become more deliberately spoken and more acutely heard by the pair of walkers. The fist-to-five signal for discomfort is especially important during the walking, listening, and speaking experience. Participants may step out of the walkway.

Cool	Sharp	Hot
happy	Naomi and Mr. Crane's colored boy	Trash
alive	Bigger and better plans for his one and only daughter	N*****-loving hussy
She knew	Gibbler dragged her around	Another sort of trash
In the woods	A greaser's a greaser	A whiff of something foul
Could be your smelling	Naomi was greasing up the school	How to get in her
told and retold	Faded dress and ratty cardigan	How to get rid of her
poor thing	Remember how that stank?	How to stay clear of her
Hard worker	Gosh but it stinks	Dirty Mexican
We needed the Mexican girl	Unlikely foursome	Mexicans were filthy
we	Lazy	Slept with horses or pigs
us	Things you didn't want other folks to know about	You might get a disease standing next to her
word was	We rarely felt sorry	Darkie school
A braid long out of style	Not at all careful	And that only made Miranda hate Naomi more
We had good reason	Mexican girl	Maybe that's why she started whispering
We had all heard	Coloreds	Could Mexicans blush?

■ **FIGURE 2.1** Student-selected words and phrases indicating volatility of The Gang's language

As partners began slowly walking and speaking, the pathway became more crowded, and voices rose in whispers, as though forbidden secrets were being passed along. In our limited class time, most pairs walked through the word “carpet” only one time. After everyone walked through, Pat asked them to write about the value of this experience for themselves and potentially for others. In their writing and subsequent whole group sharing about their journey across the “carpet,” participants expressed their surprise at the depth of feeling and memory evoked by their minimal embodiment of the words and as guides or recipients of exclusionary, racist, and sexist words. By literally standing on the words of the text, students experienced the dialogic, dual-world movement (Edmiston, 2016; Edmiston & Enciso, 2002; Medina, 2004) that enables both emotional closeness and critical self-reflection. The Gang's social mind was simultaneously deeply felt and resisted within the close space of multiple linguistic pathways. Racism and misogyny became words, felt intimately, in the mouths, ears, and footsteps of experts/students. They embodied the social mind as they realized that these words are not merely anachronisms or someone else's problem. They remembered the feeling of these words in their own lives.

We agree with Winn (2013) that in the face of fictional and real gross racism, inequity, and violence, a restorative English classroom may be our most powerful tool for staying in conversation and seeking new ways of talking and acting for social change. We would add that dramatic inquiry fosters the qualities and depths of embodied dialogue during and after reading that may engender real life acts of love and refusal in the face of violent exclusion.

SEE ALSO

Hinds, G. (2013). *Romeo and Juliet*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press.

This graphic novel is a faithful adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* in which Hinds depicts a multiracial cast of characters. Teachers might begin with an analysis of the word *banish'd* in the text. What does *banish'd* mean to these characters in this text, when Hinds includes no mention (in the body of the text) of institutional or social divisions based on racial identity? How does racial positioning matter to the story's unfolding tragedy?

Draper, S. (2001). *Romiette and Julio*. New York, NY: Aladdin Paperbacks (1999).

This novel, set in Cincinnati, Ohio, shifts the family feud to racial tensions between African-American and Latinx gangs. Teachers can examine the words and actions of the Devildogs, the local gang who are against the interracial relationship, as a space to explore the social mind contained in this book.

Sáenz, B.A. (2004). *Sammy and Juliana in Hollywood*. El Paso, TX: Cinco Puntos Press.

Sáenz's coming-of-age novel, set during the Vietnam War, follows two friends as they navigate life, love, and loss in their New Mexican barrio. While told in first person, teachers could use this text to assist students in identifying how the social mind can be made visible without we-narration but through the reactions of the narrator as he navigates racism and intolerance.

Abawi, A. (2014). *The secret sky*. New York, NY: Philomel Books.

Set against the backdrop of war-torn Afghanistan, this text is about the forbidden love between a working-class Hazara girl and a Pashtun boy from a land-owning family. Teachers could use the chapters featuring the Pashtun protagonist's zealous cousin as an entry point into discussing social minds.

Laskin, P.L. (2017). *Ronit and Jamil*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Children's Books.

This verse novel is a contemporary adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, wherein the star-crossed lovers belong to either side of a fence that divides Israel and Palestine. Teachers can choose some of the poems from Act II and Act IV to highlight social minds in this novel.

REFERENCES

- Bekhta, N. (2017). We-narratives: The distinctiveness of collective narration. *Narrative*, 25(2), 164–181. <https://doi.org/10.1353/nar.2017.0008>.
- Edmiston, B. (2003). What's my position? Role, frame, and positioning when using process drama. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 8(2), 221–229.
- Edmiston, B. (2013). *Transforming teaching and learning with active and dramatic approaches: Engaging students across the curriculum*. New York: NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Edmiston, B. (2016). Promoting teachers' ideological becoming: Using dramatic inquiry in teacher education. *Literacy research: Theory, Method, and Practice*, 65(1), 332–347. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2381336916661540>.
- Edmiston, B., & Enciso, P. (2002). Reflections and refractions of meaning: Dialogic approaches to classroom drama and reading. In D. Lapp & D. Fisher (Eds.), *The handbook of research on teaching and the English language arts* (pp. 868–880). New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.
- Medina, C. L. (2004). The construction of drama worlds as literary interpretation of Latina feminist literature. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 9(2), 145–160. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1356978042000255049>.
- Medina, C. L., & Wohlwend, K. E. (2014). *Literacy, play and globalization: Converging imaginaries in children's critical and cultural performances*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- O'Neill, C. (1995). *Drama worlds: A framework for process drama*. Ontario, Canada: Pearson Education Canada.
- Palmer, A. (2011). Social minds in fiction and criticism. *Style*, 45(2), 196–240.
- Pérez, A. H. (2015). *Out of darkness*. Minneapolis, MN: Carolrhoda Lab.
- Rowlands, L. (2014, February 23). *Word carpet: Blog post*. Try this teaching. Retrieved from www.trythisteaching.com/2014/02/word-carpet/.
- Sassi, K., & Thomas, E. (2008). Walking the talk: Examining privilege and race in a ninth-grade classroom. *English Journal*, 97(6), 25–31.
- Thomas, M. E. (2009). The identity politics of school life: Territoriality and the racial subjectivity of teen girls in LA. *Children's Geographies*, 7(1), 7–19.
- Winn, M. (2013). Forum: Toward a restorative English education. *Research in the teaching of English*, 48(1), 126–135.

Neoliberalism

A Framework for Critiquing Representations of the “Superspecial” Individual in *Marcelo in the Real World*

Sean P. Connors and Roberta Seelinger Trites

During the 1980s, President Ronald Reagan and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher deregulated much of the economy. Their goal in doing so was to make economic markets as free as possible. They believed that “free trade” and “free markets” unrestricted by trade agreements, tariffs, or government interventions created expanding economies. This movement came to be called “neoliberalism” because it evoked a “new” form of the liberal economic theories that were popular in the 19th century: those that advocated for *laissez-faire*, noninterventionist, economic policies, ultimately providing a rationale for governments to leave businesses alone.

According to neoliberalism, the individual freed from government regulation is the most important economic engine to create new products and services (Harvey, 2005). During the 1980s, neoliberalism led to many forms of institutional deregulation, such as the deregulation of banks, airlines, investment brokerages, the media, international trade, and environmental protections. The economy was freed to expand rapidly, but growth came at a cost, as evidenced by major accounting scandals at firms such as Enron in 2001, a housing bubble that burst in 2006 and 2007, and the Great Recession of 2008.

By treating all aspects of human life as markets, this economic theory promotes competition amongst people and institutions to drive ingenuity and advancement, such that individuals must become their own self-agents, continually promoting themselves and expanding their knowledge and skill sets lest they lose ground to competitors. An economic system that values individualism over collectivism and which defines success based on the ability to contribute to the economy minimizes people’s motivation to work together toward a common good.

Like other forms of popular culture, young adult (YA) literature can serve as a conduit for neoliberal ideologies, naturalizing this worldview so that readers accept it without interrogating it. Moreover, by emphasizing individualism

and free-market economics and by depicting government and other public institutions as hostile to these ideals, neoliberalism perpetuates an assumption that individuals compete on a level playing field and succeed as a result of their own talents, thus erasing the role that constructs such as race, gender, ability, and class play in privileging some groups of people while oppressing others, which subsequently fosters the impression that complex social problems, such as racism, are individual, rather than systemic problems. In all of these ways, neoliberalism is antithetical to the project of multicultural YA literature.

We rely on a three-part framework to identify and critique neoliberalism and its ideologies in multicultural YA fiction. We are especially interested in examining how neoliberalism undergirds representations of the “superspecial” individual, a trope that we argue is common in contemporary YA fiction. After introducing our framework and identified questions designed to help teachers and students critique neoliberalism in multicultural YA novels, we apply the framework to *Marcelo in the Real World* (Stork, 2009), which is narrated from the perspective of a teenager experiencing Asperger syndrome–like symptoms. By examining how the novel treats institutions, individual exceptionalism, and interdependence (as opposed to independence), we demonstrate how it rejects neoliberal ideologies to embrace a more progressive, inclusive worldview. To conclude, we highlight classroom activities that support students’ examining not only how multicultural novels reproduce and resist neoliberalism, but also how this economic theory shapes readers’ experiences in the world.

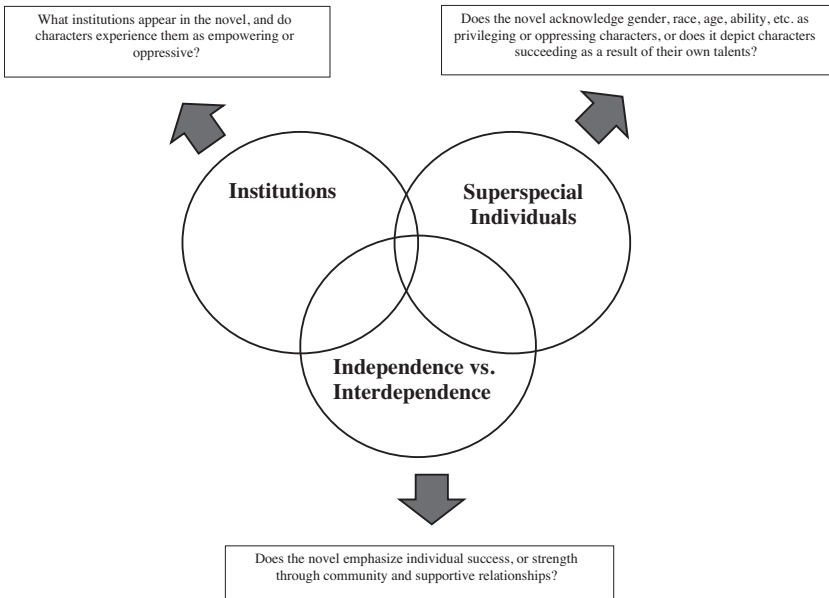
A FRAMEWORK FOR CRITIQUING NEOLIBERALISM

As seen in Figure 3.1, our framework begins with our asking how institutions are represented in texts. Next, we analyze the concept of “superspecialness,” a trait on which many popular YA novels rely when they depict teenagers who are far above average in their abilities. Finally, we examine the relationship between interdependence and independence as markers that can help readers assess the extent to which a novel is driven by (or rejects) neoliberal ideologies.

Teachers who are concerned about the prospect of introducing a complex economic theory to younger students need not use the term “neoliberalism.” Instead, teachers can ask students to attend closely to a certain type of character in popular culture, one that we call the “superspecial individual,” a figure who is exceptional and capable of succeeding despite the odds. Having shared examples of this figure in popular films and television shows, we ask students to identify “superspecial individuals” they are familiar with in YA novels or films. As they name such characters as Katniss Everdeen or Harry Potter, we ask them to apply the questions in Figure 3.1 to the storyworlds these characters inhabit, which problematizes the emphasis on individual exceptionalism.

When students are comfortable working with the questions in our framework, we invite them to work with a multicultural YA novel the whole class has read. We divide the students into three groups and facilitate a silent discussion. To begin, each of the groups is given a poster board with three questions

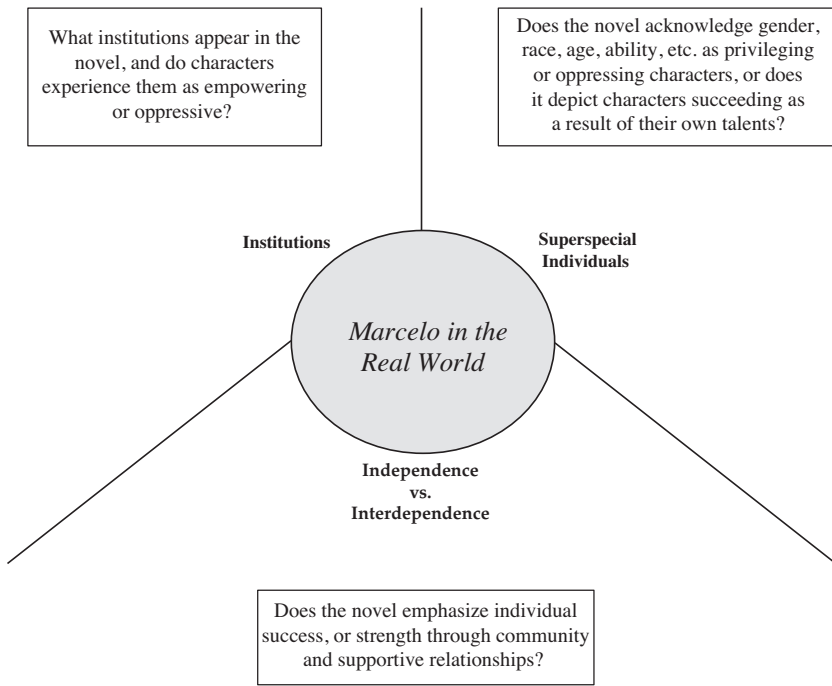
A Framework for Examining Neoliberal Ideology in YAL



■ **FIGURE 3.1** Framework for Identifying and Critiquing Neoliberalism

(see Figure 3.2). We then invite each group to address one of the three questions. Rather than respond verbally, we ask students to record their responses directly onto the poster board. To encourage written dialogue, we also ask them to respond to at least one comment another member of their group shares. Once students have had time to respond, they circulate the poster boards and repeat the process. This time, however, they also address the question assigned to the previous group and respond to comments its members contributed. Students then circulate the boards a third time, with the result that, by the end of the activity, each group has responded to all three discussion questions. When students receive their initial poster board back, we give them time to read the comments their classmates shared. Throughout this process, we circulate, making note of student comments and questions that strike us as interesting. These then become the basis for a class discussion as we guide students in evaluating the extent to which the novel we are studying reproduces or resists neoliberal ideologies. Students need not address all three questions in our critical framework at one time. Instead, teachers can introduce them gradually to scaffold students' ability to apply them to literary texts.

In the next section, we draw on our experiences working with pre-service teachers in a YA literature course to apply our three-part framework to *Marcelo in the Real World*, a multicultural novel that addresses the topic of disability. We demonstrate how the book resists neoliberalism through its positive



■ **FIGURE 3.2** Silent Discussion Poster Board

portrayal of collectivist institutions, its refusal to erase constructs like ability, race, and class, and its valuing of interdependence over independence.

EXAMINING *MARCELO IN THE REAL WORLD* AS A COUNTER-STORY TO NEOLIBERALISM

In *Marcelo in the Real World*, the eponymous protagonist is a 17-year-old Mexican American boy experiencing symptoms he likens to those associated with Asperger syndrome. Marcelo is compelled by his father, a successful corporate attorney, to enter into the following arrangement: provided Marcelo is able to satisfactorily perform a summer job in the mailroom at the law firm where his father, Arturo, is a partner, thus demonstrating his ability to function in what Arturo calls the “real world,” Marcelo will be permitted to return to Paterson, a school for students with special needs, for his senior year. In the event that he is unsuccessful, he must attend Oak Ridge, a public high school that Arturo believes will prepare his son to navigate the world in competition with neurotypical people.

At the law firm, Marcelo becomes interested in a lawsuit involving a teenage girl, Ixtel, whose face was disfigured when the windshield in a car in which she was traveling shattered during a minor traffic accident. He eventually learns

that the maker of the windshield knew its design was faulty but continued to manufacture the windshield, reasoning that the cost involved in halting production was prohibitive. When Marcelo learns that his father's law firm chose to withhold this information during the court proceedings, he decides to share the information with Ixtel's lawyer, which places his father's firm in jeopardy. Ultimately, an angry Arturo pronounces his son's experience at the law firm a failure and informs him that he will attend Oak Ridge. Marcelo accepts Arturo's decision, but he begins to plan for his future, deciding that after graduation, he will attend college in Vermont to pursue a degree in nursing and work with children with disabilities. When we begin to engage students in evaluating the extent to which the novel reproduces or resists neoliberalism, we first ask them to describe how the text portrays institutions.

Institutions

According to noted anthropologist David Harvey (2005), neoliberalism is based on an assumption that individuals who are unfettered by social institutions thrive (p. 2). As seen in Figure 3.1, a first question that teachers and students can ask to critique neoliberalism in multicultural YA novels is thus: *What institutions appear in the novel, and do characters experience them as empowering or oppressive?*

When our students have applied this question to *Marcelo and the Real World*, they quickly identify two institutions that differentiate between individualist institutions and their collectivist counterparts. They note that the law firm where Arturo works is a competitive environment where the profit margin is emphasized over the needs of employees and the victims of crimes (such as Ixtel, the girl disfigured by a faulty windshield). Conversely, they interpret Paterson, the school for students with special needs, as a collectivist institution that accepts all students for their strengths and limitations alike. The therapy horses that Marcelo works with represent the importance of caring and sharing as a collectivist unit. Marcelo plans to spend his future in a similarly collectivist environment.

In Arturo's words, "A law firm is not like Paterson. In a law firm, the environment is competitive" (p. 43). Emphasizing competition's role in neoliberalism, Arturo instructs Marcelo, "Competition is good for all involved. The harder Stephen [a colleague] works, the harder and better I work. The more the associates work, the better the whole firm does" (p. 43). Arturo also informs Marcelo, "Every day I come to work, I tell myself, I'm a warrior and this is a battle. I put on my war face" (p. 46). Extending this metaphor, he likens his position at the law firm to "a war, where some will win and some will lose," prompting Marcelo to reflect, "*The real world*" (p. 46, emphasis in original). Despite how Arturo affirms competition, the novel positions readers to question the desirability of living in an endlessly competitive world.

In contrast, the narrative depicts Paterson as a more desirable environment precisely because it is collectivist rather than individualistic and competitive. As

a teenager on the spectrum, Marcelo understands how the accommodations that teachers at Paterson make for him empower him. He arrives at school each day with the feeling that “here at last is a place where I will not be hurried” (p. 12). He understands that while “Explanations about my condition are based on the assumption that there is something wrong with the way I am, . . . at Paterson I have learned through the years that it is not helpful to view myself or the other kids there that way” (p. 55). In this way, Paterson provides a collective space that allows individuals to thrive because they are accepted within a larger community that supports and empowers them.

Individuals, Ability, and Difference

Pomerantz and Raby (2015) indirectly link neoliberalism’s emphasis on individual exceptionalism to YA literature when they examine the trope of the “post-nerd smart girl” (p. 287), a figure who is intelligent, beautiful, athletic, and popular, and who accomplishes whatever she wants to. They note, however, that these girls’ “struggles are never connected to sexism, racism, heterosexism, and other social inequities” (p. 303). Instead, the trope of the post-nerd smart girl fosters the illusion that individuals compete on a level playing field and succeed as a result of their own talents and abilities, thus perpetuating the neoliberal deception that we live in a post-feminist, post-race society. Relying on Pomerantz and Raby, we argue that multicultural YA novels which celebrate “superspecial” individuals risk erasing the impact of racism, sexism, and ableism. A second question that teachers and students can ask of these texts is thus: *Does the novel acknowledge gender, race, age, ability, etc. as privileging or oppressing characters, or does it depict characters succeeding as a result of their own talents?*

When we have discussed *Marcelo in the Real World* with students, they have suggested that the novel resists neoliberalism’s tendency to erase race, class, gender, and ability by continually reminding the reader of the role that identity politics play in privileging some characters over others. They note, for example, that whereas Wendell, the Harvard-educated son of the law firm’s other major partner, Stephen Holmes, slanders Marcelo’s father in private by referring to him as a “minority hire”—a term that Stephen uses to refer to a person “whose skin is darker than the majority of folks, someone not born lily-white” (pp. 127–128)—he fails to interrogate his privilege as a white, college-educated male from an upper-class family that traces its “lineage all the way to the folks that arrived on the *Mayflower*” (p. 127). Marcelo, however, acknowledges the role that his own socioeconomic status plays in advantaging him when he reflects that “without the money Arturo earns from [the windshield company], we may not be able to afford Paterson” (p. 212). Ixtel, on the other hand, lacks both the economic resources and the social capital needed to pay for cosmetic surgery and is thus left to live with her disfigurement.

The novel implies that the emphasis that neoliberalism places on meritocracy may disadvantage oppressed peoples still further by pitting them against

one another, thus inhibiting their ability to form alliances that could lead to social gains. As an example, when Marcelo visits Jerry Garcia, a Mexican American lawyer who represents struggling people in a Hispanic neighborhood in Boston, he is surprised to learn that Garcia was a classmate of Arturo at Harvard. According to Garcia, the seven Mexican American students in the law program met on a weekly basis to play poker. Rather than forge alliances, however, the students competed viciously, leading them to “openly envy and insult each other” (p. 189). Garcia explains, “I could tell that people were really pissed when one got an A and the others didn’t or when one got a job offer with a bigger law firm” (p. 190). His classmates could not understand why Garcia was motivated to open “a solo practice in a poor neighborhood,” which suggests that their drive for personal profit overshadowed any obligation they felt to serve their community. In contrast, the novel positions readers to admire Garcia precisely because he devotes himself to advocating for socially marginalized people.

Independence vs. Interdependence

We argue that a growing number of contemporary YA novels privilege the independent individual over the collective efficacy that can emerge when a group of people works together. This privileging of independence is premised on a binary that regards independence as more desirable than dependence. *Interdependence* (Goodley & Rapley, 2002), however, involves people pooling their strengths and working together to advance their collective interests. Thus, the third question we ask is this: *Does the novel appear to emphasize individual success or strength through community and supportive relationships?*

Marcelo’s relationship with a female rabbi, Rabbi Heschel, provides him with one argument for the importance of interdependence. She critiques members of her congregation who are “worried about upgrading [their] Mercedes. [. . .] You think [God is] asking you to be a big success in whatever it is you’re ambitious about, and that’s not what he wants from you at all” (p. 276). In contrast, at the law firm, the principles that Rabbi Heschel advocates are inverted. When Marcelo tells Arturo, “The first will be last,” his father replies, “In the world of work, the first are first and will be first and the last are last and will be last” (p. 44). When a lawyer at the firm, having questioned the advisability of not compensating people for their injuries in the windshield case, is fired for being “too soft” (p. 173), the law firm differentiates between winners and losers, with the former consisting of people who contribute to the firm’s economy. Those who are not regarded as having something to contribute are disposable.

If neoliberalism emphasizes independence over interdependence, Rabbi Heschel’s mentorship counter-instructs Marcelo, teaching him that acting toward the common good creates more benefit than protecting certain individuals because they are superspecial. He is angry with his father’s law firm for covering up the windshield case, reasoning that helping Ixtel “is something

[Arturo] should do, we should all do” (p. 205). He reflects, “For all the pain I saw at Paterson, it is nothing compared to the pain that people inflict upon each other in the real world. All I can think of now is that it is not right for me to be unaware of that pain, including the pain that I inflict on others” (p. 302). As our students have argued, it is not surprising that Marcelo, at the novel’s conclusion, decides that he wants to pursue a career in nursing, a profession that involves caring for others. In settling on this career path, Marcelo chooses interdependence over independence as a more humane, more compassionate way of living in the world.

CONCLUSION

We are heartened by the availability of multicultural YA novels that we interpret as resisting neoliberal ideals (see “See Also” below). That said, the frequency with which a neoliberal worldview informs books and films marketed to young people concerns us. Left unexamined, texts that erase race, gender, ability, and class in the service of touting exceptional individualism risk inadvertently perpetuating systemic problems caused by discrimination. We argue that students are empowered when teachers equip them to identify and critique neoliberalism, as they are when they learn to ask whether neoliberalism is an ideology with which they wish to orient themselves in their relationships.

Teachers and students are impacted by neoliberalism, which is behind movements to privatize education and defund public institutions, including schools, libraries, and universities, and which is evident in mandates that hold schools accountable for ensuring that students are “career ready,” as though individuals are resources for corporate consumption. Its influence is also evident in efforts to repeal environmental protections that are meant to ensure that people have access to clean air and water. Indeed, Hill (2016) has linked neoliberalism to the water crisis in Flint, Michigan, demonstrating how the situation was brought about in part through decisions that were made in the name of cost efficiency as opposed to the common good.

Although the term *neoliberalism* is unfamiliar to the majority of our students, when we have talked about it with them, we have found that they often describe feeling pressured to compete for better grades to get into better schools to secure better-paying, more stable jobs, which they recognize are increasingly rare in today’s globalized economy. In fact, many of our students describe feeling anxious. Recognizing this, teachers who work with upper-grade students could invite them to debate the cost to people of endlessly competing for resources and opportunities or the long-term effects of a society’s placing the interests of the individual over those of the collective. As one student recently explained, “Maybe if more people knew that the stress we’re all living with is attributable to a system that’s forcing us to compete against each other, we could start to imagine other ways of living together.”

Arthur Frank (2010) argues that “Stories work with people, for people, and always stories work *on* people, affecting what people are able to see as real, as

possible, and as worth doing or best avoided” (p. 3, emphasis in original). Our student’s comment is a reminder of the important role that stories can play in allowing us to see alternatives to the social arrangements that organize our lives. At its best, multicultural YA literature offers a window onto the experiences of marginalized peoples, allowing students who identify with these groups to see their experiences represented in literature, while also exposing students who identify with the dominant culture to experiences different from their own. When multicultural YA novels emphasize competition between people, however, or when they differentiate between winners and losers, they undermine that important work. By learning to detect the presence of neo-liberalism and its attendant ideologies in multicultural YA literature, and in popular culture more generally, students may come to appreciate the value of treating all people with compassion, dignity, and respect, regardless of their perceived value or preparedness to generate profits.

SEE ALSO

Bray, L. (2011). *Beauty queens*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

When a plane full of beauty pageant contestants crashes on a deserted island, the young women are confronted with survival. The group is a diverse group, racially, ethnically, and in terms of sexual orientation and identification, and they grow to function as a team of supportive feminists. The text engages queer theory, Critical Race Theory, and material feminism in its clear message to teenagers that physical beauty matters less than resilience, strength, and intelligence.

Quintero, I. (2014). *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces*. El Paso, TX: Cinco Puntos Press.

Gabi is a Latina teenager whose mother is suspicious of Gabi’s sexuality. Gabi learns how to own her own embodiment through interacting with the experiences of her friends and family members. This novel explores the intersectionality of race and social class in the specific context of what it means to be a Latina teenager.

Schrefer, E. (2012). *Endangered*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

Caught amidst a civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo, 15-year-old Sophie, accompanied only by a bonobo she has vowed to care for, embarks on a journey to reunite with her mother. The novel problematizes binaries that privilege some life forms over others and examines how the same patriarchal structures that oppress girls and women are responsible for environmental problems.

Smith, S.L. (2008). *Flygirl*. New York, NY: G. P. Putnam’s Sons.

Ida Mae Jones is desperate to support her country during World War II, but black women are not allowed to serve as Women’s Airforce Service Pilots. Although Ida is African-American, she passes for a white woman to follow her dream—and then must confront the realities that happen to people who hide

their own identity. This novel offers a historical perspective on Critical Race Theory and feminism.

Kadohata, C. (2008). *Outside beauty*. New York, NY: Atheneum Books for Young Readers.

Four sisters who have the same Japanese American mother but different fathers explore the nature of true beauty. The text problematizes race and ethnicity, emphasizing the pressures put on girls and women to achieve unrealistic standards of beauty.

REFERENCES

- Frank, A. W. (2010). *Letting stories breathe: A socio-narratology*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Goodley, D., & Rapley, M. (2002). Changing the subject: Postmodernity and people with 'learning difficulties'. In M. Corker & T. Shakespeare (Eds.), *Disability/post-modernity: Embodying disability theory* (pp. 127–142). London, UK: Cassell.
- Harvey, D. A. (2005). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Hill, M. L. (2016). *Nobody: Casualties of America's war on the vulnerable, from Ferguson to Flint and beyond*. New York, NY: Atria.
- Pomerantz, S., & Raby, R. (2015). Reading smart girls: Post-nerds in post-feminist popular culture. In C. Bradford & M. Reimer (Eds.), *Girls, texts, cultures* (pp. 287–311). Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press.
- Stork, F. X. (2009). *Marcelo in the real world*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

The Dominant/Oppositional Gaze

The Power of Looking in *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass*

Emily Wender

During 2017, women across the world shared via social networks the hashtag #MeToo, identifying for friends, family, and others that they had experienced sexual harassment or assault. Within the entertainment industry, #MeToo exposed sexual predators who repeatedly preyed on women and men (Langone, 2018), but it also pointed out widespread inequality in both pay and representation, spawning the related movement, #TimesUp. Natalie Portman's Golden Globes Best Director award announcement, "And here are the all-male nominees," reminded viewers that men are most likely to be directing the camera and thus steering the vision of the audience (Gajanan, 2018).

Film theory has long recognized the problematic effects of this stark gender imbalance. In the 1970s, drawing on Freud and Lacan, Mulvey (1999) offered the "male gaze" as a way to describe how visual media position men as viewers and women as those to be viewed. For audience members to enjoy the film, Mulvey explains, regardless of their gender, they would need to embrace the male character (or viewer) as the dominant subject, the one doing the looking and acting, and the female character as the passive object, the one to be looked at and acted upon (pp. 837–838). Scholars have applied Mulvey's theory to literature for children and young adults, investigating acts of looking and how they construct positions of power. For example, Hayes (2016) details how "acts of looking function as socialising processes" in *The Secret Garden*, specifically around gender. As Mary gazes on Colin, she teaches him, as a Victorian mother might, how to use the gaze to establish his own power over others, thus creating in Colin a "model of male subjectivity."

Although Mulvey's theory focuses primarily on gender, theorists across disciplines have extended Mulvey's metaphor to recognize other dominant gazes, such as a racialized gaze (Russell, 1991; hooks, 1992; Hum, 2015). When a story adopts this dominant gaze, it positions characters of color as objects, people to be seen, reduced, or stereotyped (hooks, 1992). Readers, teachers, and scholars have discussed the harm inflicted when literature and media reproduce society's

dominant gazes, creating images that are “distorted, negative, or laughable” (Bishop, 1990). Through these images, many children “learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society,” while others “grow up with an exaggerated sense of their own importance and value in the world,” both realities that have allowed dominant gazes to continue (Bishop, 1990).

In contrast to stories that reproduce the dominant gaze, counter-stories “aim to subvert” the assumed dominance of an ingroup (Delgado, 1989, p. 2413), illuminating perspectives that challenge the simplified stories that have kept groups in power (Glenn, 2012; Tschida, Ryan, & Ticknor, 2014) and offering a “consciousness” that has been “suppressed, devalued, and abnormalized” (Delgado, 1989, p. 2412). For example, although set in a world that maintained female inequality, Garber (2017) reminds us that *Pride and Prejudice* offered a sharp counter-story to literature of its time, exemplifying the female gaze: “It placed women—their perspectives, their concerns, their humor, their desires, their rich inner lives—at the center of the story.” As Garber (2017) captures in her analysis of Austen, the counter-story positions those in outgroups as describing and shaping their own experiences and histories in the world.

hooks (1992) identifies acts of viewing, not only as acts of counter-story-telling, such as Austen’s, as ways that those in outgroups counter society’s dominant gazes. For example, emphasizing the need for intersectionality, hooks (1992) positions black women’s spectatorship and theorizing as creating what she calls the “oppositional gaze.” Describing black women’s acts of spectatorship, she writes, “[W]e see our history as counter-memory, using it as a way to know the present and invent the future” (p. 264). The counter-story, then, is one way for characters, viewers, and readers to “fully define their reality” (hooks, 1992, p. 262). In the era of #MeToo and #TimesUp, of #BlackLivesMatter and the #WeNeedDiverseBooks campaign, the theories of the dominant gaze and the counter-story are crucial to our seeing, our reading, and our teaching. Multicultural young adult (YA) literature, in particular, powerfully counters the dominant gaze by making it visible to the reader through honest first-person narrators, explorations of identity, and recognition of society’s injustices. All three of these features apply to Meg Medina’s novel *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass* (2013).

THE DOMINANT GAZE IN *YAQUI DELGADO WANTS TO KICK YOUR ASS*

Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass is a novel about a young Latina woman who, as a victim of bullying, feels the constant need to watch out and the constant sense that she is being watched. Thus, gazing in multiple ways plays a significant role in the novel. The narrator, Piedad (Piddy) Sanchez, starts the book about to move with her mother from one working-class neighborhood in Queens, NY, to another. Although she and her mother gain a safer apartment

building, Piddy loses the school “on the better side of Northern Boulevard” (p. 8). At her new school, Piddy struggles to fit in while suddenly becoming the target of a bully; she manages continual threats, hurled food, and eventually a violent physical attack. As she skips school, avoids classwork, and tries to disappear, Piddy loses her academic identity as a strong student with ambitions to become a biologist.

Medina gives us several moments from the beginning of the novel that help establish the ways in which Piddy faces the dominant gazes of others, especially as a Latina teenager. In the first chapter alone, Piddy is told that she “shakes her ass,” which is why Yaqui Delgado is after her; she endures obscene hand gestures and comments by students outside school, even when she “walk[s] fast, trying not to be noticed” (p. 2); and she is censored by her mother after “a man on the bus gawk[s] at [her] chest” (p. 3). At the same time, she finds herself having to prove her Latina identity at school because she seems too “white.” Early on, for instance, she is told by her friend that these “Latin girls mean business,” only to have to counter yet another dominant gaze: “I’m a Latin girl, too,” Piddy points out (p. 6).

Yet the novel also illustrates how dominant gazes have come to shape the sight of even those who love Piddy the most. This theme is most explored through Piddy’s relationship with her mother, which becomes increasingly distant throughout the novel. Ma, working long hours of physical labor to support herself and Piddy, does not know that Piddy is being bullied. Instead, Ma interprets Piddy’s actions through negative stereotypes of teenagers and young Latina women. After Ma discovers a hickey on Piddy’s neck, for example, she grabs and accuses her, “So that’s where you were the other night? Rolling around with some boy like a tramp” (pp. 114–115). Not long after, Piddy further removes herself from Ma when she overhears her explaining Piddy’s behavior, having recently run away, to the police officer who brought her home: “*I don’t know what’s wrong with her. Teenagers, blah-blah*” (p. 198).

As the novel progresses, we see how Piddy internalizes the dominant gazes of society in troubling ways. For example, when Piddy becomes engulfed by the threat of Yaqui, she starts to reject her body, which she sees as bringing her male attention and thus invoking Yaqui’s rage:

I run the water hot and strip off my clothes. Then I stare at myself long and hard in the mirror. I hate the slopes and curves; they’ve caused nothing but trouble. If having a body is so great, why has it made such a mess for me?
(p. 151)

She now sees her body as a problem, so much so that she “hate[s]” her shape, despite how she feels when she is dancing salsa or merengue, a source of cultural and personal pride.

We see a similar struggle to live in her own body when Piddy admits that she “feels ashamed under Joey’s gaze” (p. 184). Joey is an old friend and burgeoning love interest, and although Piddy desires Joey’s gaze on her, she

cannot meet it, instead feeling humiliated by her recently beaten body—its “purples and greens” and “bumps and swells” (p. 183). Joey, whose violent father beats his mother every night, studies her skin gently with his finger, goes silent, and turns pale, deciding to cover her with a sheet. When Piddy cries in response and says that she’s “sorry,” her “words are like a hard slap that makes his face contort. [. . .] ‘Don’t say that,’ he says, eyes blazing. ‘Not ever’” (p. 185).

This scene emphasizes how embodied gazing is; it is her own bruised body that Piddy wants to forget, and it is Joey’s mother’s bruised body that he is also trying to escape. There is no way to gaze without living in one’s own body and seeing another. Although Piddy offers us little in terms of reflection, in this moment Medina suggests that Joey does not think Piddy should apologize for her body or her pain. Instead, the scene leaves space for the potential for Piddy to meet Joey’s gaze in the future, perhaps at a moment when she can gaze at her own body through a lens of pride.

Medina counters these moments of Piddy’s rejection of her body and the gazes on it (hers or Joey’s) with an instance of Piddy dancing, one in which she feels confidence and freedom:

I turn, turn, turn into my salsa without missing a single step, just like she showed me.

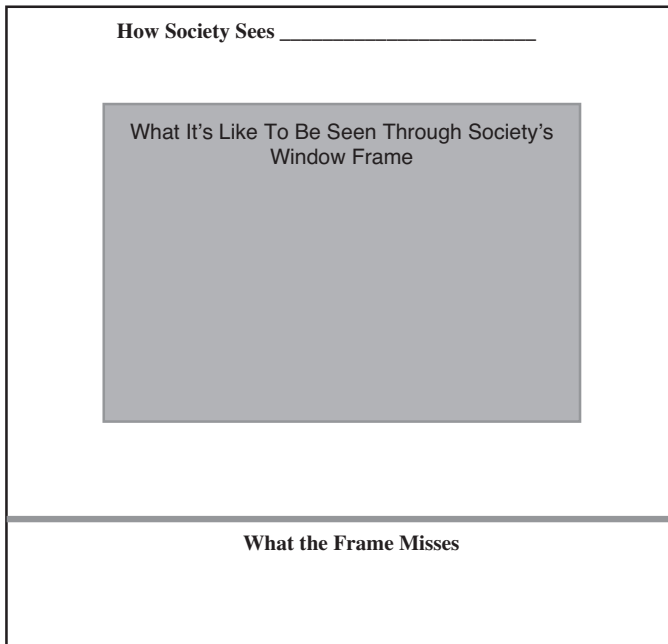
From the corner of my eye, I can see that the guys at the bar have stopped talking. Even Ma looks like she’s easing up, although I can’t guess what she’s thinking. Yaqui Delgado melts away from me, if only for a few minutes.

(p. 128)

Here Medina shifts the emphasis of the gaze. Although Medina implies that “guys at the bar” are looking at Piddy, Piddy isn’t focused on their gaze, and neither are we. It is her own feelings while dancing—“turn[ing] without missing a single step”—that allow her to forget her current torment. I would offer this scene as a counter to the dominant gaze. Piddy is both subject and object of the gaze here, and Medina suggests that the beauty of her dance is as mesmerizing for her as it is for her audience.

Teaching the Dominant Gaze in *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass*

Engaging students in considerations of how dominant gazes shape their own experiences requires connecting their prior knowledge of stereotypes to metaphors of sight. Visual language helps readers become aware of a) how society’s messages and stereotypes problematically frame our own looking at others; b) the physical feeling of being looked at in diminishing or reductive ways; and c) the embodied power we have to see differently. One way to begin this conversation is through the visual of a window frame (see Figure 4.1).



■ **FIGURE 4.1** Window Frame

When introducing this image, I explain that as people inside of society, we often find ourselves seeing through the frames that society gives us—but that these frames are limiting. They never include all of the different ways a person becomes an individual and instead tend to steer us to see through small boxes, or stereotypes. On this image, the outside box represents the frame through which society asks us to see, and the inside box gives space to consider how it feels to be seen through this frame.

I often begin by collaboratively filling out the outside frame on the topic of teenagers. I specifically use this topic as my model for a variety of reasons. If teaching middle or high school, I want my students to speak to the stereotypes of teenagers personally; they recognize how they function in the world and have felt their effects. If teaching adult readers of young adult literature, I want students to start thinking about how YA literature represents teenagers through a youth lens (Sarigianides, Lewis, & Petrone, 2015).

After naming society's limited frame for teenagers, I ask students to describe a moment when they felt themselves being seen through this limited frame. What I want to capture at this beginning stage are some of the feelings of being seen in a reductive way. Naming these feelings helps students activate background knowledge that they may not have recognized as relevant to their reading experiences thus far. From here, I explore the *dominant gaze* as a term for society's limited window frame by asking students questions about their

experiences: How do we learn these limiting frames, or dominant gazes? Where do they come from? Have you ever noticed yourself seeing someone through the dominant gaze and start to question it or alter it? Have you ever noticed yourself countering someone else's dominant gaze? How did you do it?

Finally, I ask students to pick one or several of their identities and fill out a window frame individually, asking them to consider the following: How does society see you when you define yourself this way? Describe a moment when you recognized someone seeing you through this dominant gaze. What happened? How did you feel, and what did you do? Finding a way to share these can be a powerful way to highlight students' different experiences and positions in the world; silent sharing techniques, such as a gallery walk or a written conversation, can encourage active viewing of others' experiences.

Having brainstormed how society's limited ways of seeing teenagers affected their own lives, students are then primed to examine Piddy's struggle with dominant gazes. To engage students in thinking about the dominant gaze in the novel, it can be helpful to return to an adapted form of the window frame image for Piddy. Teachers can ask students to name key phrases or moments that capture the dominant gazes she encounters and then to counter that list with the moments when Piddy opposes those gazes through her words, actions, or thoughts (see Figure 4.2).

Character:
<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 80%; margin: 0 auto; padding: 10px; background-color: #f0f0f0;"> <p style="text-align: center; margin: 0;">Dominant Gazes: Key phrases or moments when the character is seen in reductive ways</p> </div>
<p>Opposing the Dominant Gaze: Key phrases or moments when the character opposes dominant gazes</p>

■ **FIGURE 4.2** Collecting Dominant Gazes in Scenes

Once students have generated several scenes in which Piddy struggles with society's dominant gazes, I ask them to choose one to analyze further. I distribute the Dominant Gazes Close Reading Questions (see Figure 4.3), which ask students to contextualize moments of gazing by inquiring into the experiences of both the viewer and the one being viewed while also pushing students to begin thinking outwards toward thematic statements about identity that might emerge from singular instances of gazing. It is worth discussing narrative perspective with students before they begin working with these questions. Given the first-person narrator, the novel presents us only with Piddy's experiences, so she is usually (although not always) the viewer or the one being viewed. At times, because Piddy is filtering others' visions through her experiences, we can only infer what others might see. At other times, dialogue makes explicit others' adoption of dominant gazes.

DOMINANT GAZES CLOSE READING QUESTIONS

Who is seeing whom in this scene? Who is telling the story? Whose perspective is most important in this moment of seeing?

If your narrator is the viewer, begin with questions about the viewer below. If the narrator is the character being looked at, begin with that set of questions below.

To Consider the Experience of the Viewer

- *What does the viewer see?*
- *Does the viewer see stereotypes or a real person? If the viewer sees stereotypes, does the viewer come to recognize the limited seeing? Does the viewer wonder about more?*
- *Is this act of seeing a reversal of power in any way? Is the viewer looking at someone the viewer wouldn't normally look at, for example? Why? What is significant about the viewer looking at the other, as opposed to the other way around?*

To Consider the Experience of the Character Being Looked At

- *How does the gaze of another character impact the one being looked at? How does the one being looked at feel under this gaze?*
- *How does the one being looked at respond?*
- *Does the viewer's gaze affirm or go against this character's own views of self?*
- *Has the character been looked at this way before? Is this a familiar gaze for the character?*

■ **FIGURE 4.3** Dominant Gazes Close Reading Questions

To Think Thematically

- *What does this moment have to do with either of the characters' evolving identities?*
- *How do we see various facets of the characters' identities at play?*

DOMINANT GAZES

CLOSE READING QUESTIONS

Who is seeing whom in this scene? Consider who is telling your story. Whose perspective is most important in this moment of seeing?

If your narrator is the viewer, then begin with questions about the viewer. If the narrator is the character being looked at, begin with that set of questions.

To Consider the Experience of the Character Being Looked At

- *How does that gaze impact the one being looked at? How do they feel under this gaze?*
- *How do they respond?*
- *Does the viewer's gaze affirm or go against how this character sees him/herself?*
- *Has the character been looked at this way before? Is this a familiar gaze for your character?*

To Consider the Experience of the Viewer

- *What does the viewer see in their gaze?*
- *Does the viewer see stereotypes, or a real person? If the viewer sees stereotypes, do they come to recognize their limited seeing? Do they wonder about more?*
- *Is this act of seeing a reversal of power in any way: is the character looking at someone they wouldn't normally look at, for example? Why? What is significant about them looking at the other, as opposed to the other way around?*

To Think Thematically

- *What does this moment have to do with either of the characters' evolving identities?*
- *How do we see various facets of characters' identities at play?*

■ **FIGURE 4.3** (Continued)

I have students use a version of the visual window frame image with the Dominant Gazes Close Reading Questions to track their close reading of a

scene. This adapted frame asks students to name both the viewer and the person being viewed (note that in Figure 4.4, the scene I analyze includes Piddy as both the viewer and the one being viewed), include textual evidence, and describe what the viewer sees and how the character being viewed feels. The bottom of the frame asks students to articulate what the gaze they are describing minimizes or misses altogether.

Although this novel acknowledges the grim realities of bullying (and the limits of adult and school protection for students), it also shows Piddy’s growing sense of self, one rooted in her body and her own gaze. Multicultural YA literature as a whole offers a unique opportunity to apply the theory of the dominant gaze. As Trites has argued (2000), a defining feature of YA literature is its “relentless” examination of power (p. xi). For the characters in marginalized groups that we meet in multicultural YA literature, this description could not be truer. To see power structures—to make decisions about how to face them, survive or advance within them, or change them—requires young adult characters to face how they are seen by others in both full and

Character Seeing: Piddy
Character Being Seen: Piddy
Page Number: 151

Quotations: “I hate the slopes and curves: they’ve caused nothing but trouble.”

The viewer sees: her body as a negative. It is something she should be ashamed of, something that has made her guilty in some way, and something she wants to erase. I think she’s hearing the voices of others (“shake your ass,” “skank”) and seeing herself through this very negative characterization of Latina women.

The character being viewed feels:
Piddy doesn’t like gazing at herself. She sees herself through the lenses of others in the novel, like the man on the subway who wants to objectify her, or her Ma, who keeps seeing her in derogatory ways because she is forming a romantic relationship.

What’s missing from the viewer’s gaze: Piddy is an awesome dancer, and she learned how to move her hips after hours of merengue dancing. Part of dancing is being in her body and feeling free. She also wants to be a scientist, and she is so committed to this dream, which gets completely lost when she focuses on her body only and sees it as a problematic part of her. She’s smart, a great writer, a hard worker, and a talented dancer who is proud of her Cuban and Dominican heritage.

■ **FIGURE 4.4** Sample Analysis of Gazing

limiting ways and to develop their own gazes in response. Ultimately, analyzing acts of gazing in multicultural YA literature demonstrates how complicated scenes of looking can be, especially as characters try to learn, face, or challenge patterns of gazing in themselves and the world.

SEE ALSO

Yang, G. (2006). *American born Chinese*. New York, NY: First Second.

This graphic novel uses the dominant gaze as a plot device when Jin imagines himself to be two imaginary others: cousin Chin-Kee, who embodies negative media representations of people of Chinese descent, and white American Danny, the dominant de-racialized subject who is allowed the dominant gaze. Combining graphic cues of television scenes, such as laugh tracks on frames, the graphic novel challenges readers to use word and image, multiple narratives, and the powerful heroes of Chinese folklore to consider the power of counter-stories.

Palacio, R.J. (2012). *Wonder*. New York, NY: Random House.

Wonder thematizes and at times falls short of problematizing gazing by telling us the story of Auggie, a young boy with a craniofacial abnormality. Auggie narrates his experiences of beginning school for the first time where he is often treated as a freak or spectacle. With multiple narrators, we are able to see how others gaze at Auggie and reflect on their gazing, while Auggie faces those gazes head on at school and in the world.

Peters, J.A. (2004). *Luna*. New York, NY: Little, Brown.

Peters' exploration of Regan and her transitioning sibling in *Luna* pushes readers to recognize how acts of looking can be both dehumanizing and validating. Regan narrates as she becomes aware of and involved in her brother's transition to her sister, Luna. The ways Regan sees Luna grow in empathy, while Luna's own acts of looking grow in strength.

REFERENCES

- Bishop, R. S. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom*, 6(3). Retrieved from <https://scenicregional.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Mirrors-Windows-and-Sliding-Glass-Doors.pdf>.
- Delgado, R. (1989). Storytelling for oppositionists and others: A plea for narrative. *Michigan Law Review*, 87(8), 2411–2441.
- Gajanan, M. (2018, January 8). Natalie Portman calls out the “all-male” best director nominees at the Golden Globes. *Time*. Retrieved from <http://time.com/5092079/natalie-portman-golden-globes-male-nominees/>.
- Garber, M. (2017, July 17). Colin Firth's shirt: Jane Austen and the rise of the female gaze. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2017/07/who-gaze-on-the-men-in-jane-austen/533415/.

- Glenn, W. (2012). Developing understandings of race: Preservice teachers' counter-narrative (re)constructions of people of color in young adult literature. *English Education*, 44(4), 326–353.
- Hayes, E. (2016). The secret garden and the gaze. *The Looking Glass: New Perspectives on Children's Literature*, 19(1). Retrieved from www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/ojs/index.php/tlg/article/view/762/707.
- hooks, B. (1992). *Black looks: Race and representation*. Boston, MA: South End Press.
- Hum, S. (2015). “Between the eyes”: The racialized gaze as design. *College English*, 77(3), 191–215.
- Langone, A. (2018, March 8). #MeToo and Time's Up founders explain the difference between the two movements—and how they're alike. *Time*. Retrieved from <http://time.com/5189945/whats-the-difference-between-the-metoo-and-times-up-movements/>.
- Medina, M. (2013). *Yaqui Delgado wants to kick your ass*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press.
- Mulvey, L. (1999). Visual pleasure and narrative cinema. In L. Braudy & M. Cohen (Eds.), *Film theory and criticism: Introductory readings* (pp. 833–844). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Russell, M. (1991). Race and the dominant gaze: Narratives of law and inequality in popular film. *Legal Studies Forum*, XV(3), 243–253. Retrieved from <http://digital-commons.law.scu.edu/facpubs>.
- Sarigianides, S., Lewis, M., & Petrone, R. (2015). How re-thinking adolescence helps re-imagine the teaching of English. *English Journal*, 104(3), 13–18.
- Trites, R. S. (2000). *Disturbing the universe: Power and repression in adolescent literature*. Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press.
- Tschida, C. M., Ryan, C. L., & Ticknor, A. E. (2014). Building on windows and mirrors: Encouraging the disruption of the “single stories” through children's literature. *Journal of Children's Literature*, 40(1), 28–39.

Multiethnic/Multicultural/ Multiracial Alloys

Reading the “Mixed” Experience in *Little & Lion*

Cammie Kim Lin

While the term *multicultural* has typically been used to signify the coexistence of and interactions between people from multiple races or ethnicities, changing demographics in the United States illustrate another important application of the term: the multiculturalism of an increasing number of *individuals*, such as those who are multiracial or multiethnic. This segment of the population is growing rapidly. While only 2 percent of the population identified as two or more races in the 2010 census, 14 percent of babies born in 2015 were multiracial or multiethnic (Livingston, 2017).

This dramatic increase in the multiracial/multiethnic population, coupled with the recent publication of numerous young adult novels featuring bicultural protagonists, suggest the need for a different sort of multicultural lens, a lens shaped by an understanding of multiculturalism as an identity. When you have a culturally mixed background, the way others see you—and, moreover, the way they make sense of who you are—tends to be based on a narrow set of assumptions about identity and experience. At the same time, the cultural lens through which mixed people see and understand the world is shaped differently than it is for monocultural people. For young people who are culturally mixed, that means that the prototypical coming-of-age tropes do not always resonate. For example, the common themes of finding oneself, fitting in, and navigating relationships can have very different meanings for mixed youth. Likewise, reading mixed identities and experiences through a monocultural lens can evoke misguided interpretations. Reading the mixed experience requires that we consider different meanings and ask different questions.

There is also another reason to consider a new lens through which to read mixed identities and experiences. Velasquez-Manoff (2017) describes numerous studies that suggest “multiracial people are more open-minded,” with more “mental flexibility,” and that “multiracial people work like a vaccine against” racial divisiveness. Velasquez-Manoff suggests that the current wave of racial divisiveness we are seeing in the US may actually reflect “the agony of

metamorphosis” in the process of becoming a “thriving multiracial nation.” It’s an optimistic view, and one that suggests that there is something to be learned from the experiences and perspectives of mixed people if we want to push back against the toxic divisiveness plaguing our culture today. Particularly in our current sociopolitical climate, when the borders—figurative and literal—between people seem to be growing, the ability to see from multiple perspectives and traverse (or straddle) borders, as mixed people often do, is invaluable.

As is evident in any writing about mixed people, including this chapter, we lack the language to adequately and accurately signify what we mean when we discuss people of mixed ethnic, racial, or cultural backgrounds. The term *mixed* itself illustrates the issue: it is a widely used self-identifier for many people, yet some find it offensive, if not unacademic or inaccurate. But what better language exists to describe individuals who are bi- or multi-racial/ethnic/cultural? Some terms are too limiting, others inaccurate, some even offensive. It is an issue that really highlights the limits (and possibilities) of language.

Like many mixed people, the language I have used not only to describe but also to conceptualize my own multicultural identity has shifted and morphed over a lifetime. One idea I keep coming back to is that being mixed is an identity unto itself. It is not merely a combination of parts that can be divided like pizza (e.g., half X, a quarter Y, and a quarter Z), or even an intersection of singular identities (e.g., the intersection of one race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual identity, and so forth). Instead, one way we might conceptualize mixed identity is with a metaphor of an *alloy*—two or more metals combined to form a new metal often stronger than the sum of its parts. Using an alloy as a metaphor emphasizes the complex, but unified, nature of mixed identity. The metaphor also respects multiple aspects of cultural mixedness (e.g., interclass or interfaith) in the alloy formation. The parts come together to form a new, unified whole.

What follows is a method for engaging students in developing and applying an *alloy identity lens*—a tool for illuminating the experiences of culturally mixed characters and how their mixedness informs who they are and how they see the world.

DEVELOPING AN ALLOY IDENTITY THEORY: INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

The practice of teaching students to read literature through existing critical lenses—or, said another way, teaching students to apply literary theory—has a long history in college and high school AP English classes. Popularized by Appleman (1999/2015), the practice has also been making its way more broadly into secondary English classrooms. Appleman advocates for the direct teaching of literary theories, as they “provide lenses that can sharpen one’s vision and provide alternative ways of seeing. They augment our sometimes failing sight and bring into relief things we fail to notice” (2015, p. 4). Implicit

in this practice is the belief that literary theory offers perspectives that can bolster students' understandings of texts and the world.

What happens, then, when the typical critical lenses—Marxism, feminism, or postcolonialism, for example—are unable to kindle complex readings of the alloy experience? What if, instead of only providing students with lenses to read through, we ask *them* to do the theorizing? Considering the rapid demographic and cultural shifts we are experiencing, it may be the students themselves who are best positioned to develop a theory about alloy identity. Students who have some experience with literary theory may be especially adept at developing a critical lens through which they might read the alloy experience in literature. Teachers who would like to engage students in this kind of theorizing and interpretive work might provide space for an inquiry-based unit in which students theorize an alloy lens through which they read one of numerous young adult novels featuring characters navigating the mixed experience. This approach could be adapted for a wide range of levels and grades, depending primarily on the texts used.

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of young adult literature titles featuring characters with mixed identities (see “See Also” below). While teachers could choose a whole-class text to study, the number of available titles—which range dramatically in terms of reading levels, age appropriateness, length, and complexity—means teachers could easily form book groups that provide students the agency necessary to position themselves as theorists and allow students’ theories and interpretations to form an exceptionally rich classroom conversation about the topic.

Introducing the Unit

One way to introduce the inquiry would be to engage and draw upon students’ initial understandings, ideas, and assumptions about ethnically, racially, or culturally mixed people (themselves or others). Teachers might invite students to list well-known culturally mixed people or, alternately, provide students with a list of names to consider, asking how they believe each person’s cultural or racial identity is typically described. Some prominent examples they might consider are President Barack Obama, the rapper Logic, Meghan Markle, Bruno Mars, Kamala Harris, Bob Marley, Tracee Ellis Ross, Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson, Ann Curry, Drake, and Demi Lovato. After asking how each person’s identity is typically described, students might consider these guiding questions: What factors contribute to how we identify other people? To how we identify ourselves? Who gets to decide “what” a person is? And how might the experience of culturally mixed people inform the ways they interact with others?

To deepen the conversation and examine the language around cultural mixedness, the class could read the illuminating and accessible essay, “All Mixed Up: What Do We Call People of Multiple Backgrounds?” (Donnella, 2016). The author, who has one white and one black parent, struggles with

the terminology. In the essay, she troubles the use of *mixed* (which her mom calls dehumanizing), *biracial* (too limited), *multiracial* (too tied to groups), and a whole slew of offensive terms that have been used to describe people like herself. She investigates not only terms used throughout American history, but also around the world. Teachers might engage the students in further analyzing—and troubling—many of these terms, some of which are metaphorical and most of which do not accurately signify what they intend.

At the end of the article, Donnella says, “I still have no answers.” That lack of an answer, a lack of adequate existing language, reveals the lack of an existing framework for illuminating and understanding the experiences and identities of culturally mixed people—a compelling starting point for an endeavor to theorize one. We do not have the right lens for this? Let’s fashion one. From there, the class could begin its inquiry, shaping a critical lens that can deepen our understanding of mixed identities and experiences. Teachers might ask students to come up with ideas for more accurate or appropriate terms to signify ethnically/racially/culturally mixed people. Or, teachers might, as I do here, propose that the term *alloy* could illuminate and bolster mixed identities and experiences. From there, the class could work to develop an *alloy identity theory*, informed by (and informing) their reading of theoretical texts and literature.

Possible Guiding Questions

- What are some characteristic experiences of people with mixed identities?
- In what ways might these experiences defy common understandings about cultural identity?
- How might the metaphor of an alloy work to illuminate and bolster mixed identities?
- On what principles might an alloy identity theory be based?
- In what ways might an alloy lens shape our readings of literature with mixed characters?

Foundational Texts

In order to theorize about alloy identities and experiences, students will need first to investigate existing theories and ideas that can inform their thinking. A good place to start would be with Gloria Anzaldúa’s (2015) “Geographies of Selves—Reimagining Identity: Nos/Otras (Us/Other), las Nepantleras, and the New Tribalism.” Older or more advanced students could read the entire chapter, while others might do best with a close reading of a few key excerpts, such as these:

For me, being Chicana is not enough—nor is being queer, a writer, or any other identity label I choose or others impose on me. Conventional,

traditional identity labels are stuck in binaries, trapped in jualas (cages) that limit the growth of our individual and collective lives. We need fresh terms and open-ended tags that portray us in all our complexities and personalities.

(p. 66)

Negotiating with borders results in mestizaje, the new hybrid, the new mestiza, a new category of identity. Mestizas live in between different worlds, in nepantla. We are forced (or choose) to live in categories that defy binaries of gender, race, class, and sexuality. Living in intersections, in cusps, we must constantly operate in a negotiation mode.

Mestizas don't fit with the norm. Depending on the degree of cultural hybridization, we are caught between cultures and can simultaneously be insiders, outsiders, and other-siders.

(p. 71)

Those who might be skeptical that this text could be accessible to typical secondary students will be interested to read the response of an on-grade-level, biracial seventh grader after a quick read of the passage:

I think it's about how traditional labels don't fit for her because she is more than one thing. The labels people use are never enough because they don't encompass all of who she is. [. . .] To some cultures, she is rejected as an outsider, but really she is an insider. It's like Logic [the rapper]. He is biracial and identifies as both black and white. But people don't accept that. They always call him a white rapper because his skin is so light, and they don't like it when he talks about his identity or calls himself black or even biracial. So he is kind of an insider and an outsider at the same time. He's not one or the other. He's both at the same time—which actually kind of makes him not quite an insider and not quite an outsider, either. Maybe that's what she means by other-sider.

While the student said the passage was challenging, he immediately gleaned significant meaning and was able to connect it to things he knows of the world. "It would be amazing if we read stuff like this in my English class!" he added. *Allons-y.*

Another text that could provide a foundation for students' inquiry is a *The New York Times* op-doc, "Being Multiracial in America" (2008), which features a group of multiracial/multiethnic college students discussing their experiences and perspectives. In addition to adding young people's voices to the conversation, it might inspire students to share their own stories or to interview people they know who have culturally mixed identities.

To consider psychological aspects of alloy identity development, students might research the work of psychologist Maria Root (2003), who has studied the experiences and self-conceptions of multiracial/multiethnic people. Root

describes multiple expressions of multiracial/multiethnic identity, including “a new racial group,” in which individuals identify not by component parts, but as an integrated whole—an alloy, effectively. In her “Bill of Rights for Racially Mixed People,” Root (1996) advocates for multiethnic/multiracial people:

I Have the Right

- not to justify my existence in this world
- not to keep the races separate within me
- not to be responsible for people’s discomfort with my physical ambiguity
- not to justify my ethnic legitimacy

I Have the Right

- to identify myself differently than strangers expect me to identify
- to identify myself differently than how my parents identify me
- to identify myself differently than my brothers and sisters
- to identify myself differently in different situations

I Have the Right

- to create a vocabulary to communicate about being multiracial
- to change my identity over my lifetime—and more than once
- to have loyalties and identify with more than one group of people
- to freely choose whom I befriend and love.

(p. 7)

While reading about and discussing mixed identities, students should be encouraged to reflect on what counts as culture and what kinds of questions arise when we undertake this inquiry. If we accept a basic definition that culture comprises beliefs, values, interests, norms, and practices shared by a group of people with some common characteristics, what kind of mixedness *counts*, so to speak? In addition to mixed racial or ethnic heritage, how about growing up with two ethnic cultures, like most children of immigrants? Or in families that come from divergent classes—say, working poor and affluent? Or religions? Or sexual identities? Is it any more a question of birthright than it is of experience or perspective? Brilliantly, the more questions you try to answer, the more that arise. Ultimately, the question that will lead to the development of an alloy lens may be: What key ideas and questions illuminate alloy experiences and identities?

At this point, students should begin reading literature through the emerging lens they are developing. If they work together to articulate some basic understandings, beliefs, and questions about alloy identities and experiences, they can continually revisit (and reshape) them as they read and discuss their novels. A useful way to do this would be through the use of a focused reading journal and group discussions that directly tackle the relevant questions, constantly asking: *What does our emerging theory of alloy identities help us to understand about the characters in this story? At the same time, how do the characters’*

stories help us to articulate a theory about alloy experiences and identities? While reading, students might also engage in ongoing research that relates to the specific identities and experiences of characters in their books.

FOCAL TEXT: *LITTLE & LION*

Though there are numerous titles that could drive this inquiry, I focus here on National Book Award Finalist and Stonewall Book Award Winner, *Little & Lion*, by Brandy Colbert (2017). Suzette, the 16-year-old protagonist, is culturally mixed. Her mother is black, and her father figure is white and Jewish; her brother, who struggles with bipolar disorder, is white; her friend group at home in Los Angeles is very diverse in terms of race, class, and sexuality, but her conservative East Coast boarding school is predominantly white.

When the novel begins, we meet Suzette as she is struggling to assert her *self* with all its complexity. She explains, “I didn’t tell many people in Avalon,” where her boarding school is, “that I’m Jewish. I wasn’t the only Jewish person there, not by far, but people have too many questions when you’re black and Jewish” (p. 33). Throughout the course of the novel, Suzette navigates multiple borders, eventually realizing how important it is that she embrace all of the elements that come together to make her who she is.

Little & Lion is an eminently readable novel that deftly explores the complexities of identity, family, and sexuality. Among the very few young adult novels featuring a bisexual protagonist, it treats Suzette’s sexual self-awareness and coming out with grace. While the sexual content (in addition to some cursing, casual drinking, and marijuana use) is likely to give pause to some teachers, others will welcome the exceptionally sensitive depictions of adolescent desire, exploration, and consent.

When Suzette returns from a year away at boarding school, she develops feelings for a longtime family friend, Emil, who is black and Korean. Prior to that, she had never felt particularly attracted to or connected with him. But this summer, when she is 16 and struggling to understand who she is and what her place is among her family and her friends, Suzette sees Emil in a different light. She finds herself attracted to him (it is mutual) and welcomes the ease with which they connect. The two bond over shared identities and experiences, including racism amidst their friends.

In one scene, Emil explains how their moms, college friends who studied in Paris together, promised they would each give their first children French names. Explaining how he always felt connected to her, Emil tells Suzette, “You know, I always felt weird growing up, having a French first name and a Korean last name and dark skin. People don’t know what to do with all that. But knowing you made me feel a little more normal. Like at least we shared two of those things” (p. 287). While their ethnic make-up is not the same, Suzette and Emil share a mixed experience and identity they don’t have in common with anyone else—not even their own parents.

The novel establishes an interesting parallel between Suzette’s cultural and sexual identity. In a flashback to her first year at boarding school, we learn that when she develops a relationship—physical and emotional—with another girl, she hides it. She says, “The truth is that I already feel so on guard, I’m not sure I’m up for being put under a new lens to be examined. [. . .] They like clear-cut boxes, and I don’t fit the one they know to be Jewish” (pp. 155–156). But hiding her sexual identity—and, moreover, her loving relationship—torments her, just as suppressing her faith does.

A summary of *Little & Lion* might make it sound like a melodramatic, unrealistic YA novel. The diversity in it is extraordinary; in addition to the racial and ethnic diversity, the book explores sexual diversity, mental illness, and physical disability alongside typical adolescent social issues. But rather than falling prey to melodrama (or rather, *more* melodrama than is realistic for teenagers), Colbert manages to explore all of it with surprising grace. By the end of the story, Suzette is ready to openly identify in the complex ways that make sense to her. Hiding the full complexity of who she is, Suzette realizes, “might actually kill [her] soul” (p. 170).

REFINING AN ALLOY LENS

After reading their books, students could work to refine their theoretical lenses. Together, each group might articulate and share its theories in a form that highlights the work as theorists, perhaps in a video presentation or an article suitable for inclusion in a critical theory anthology. Individually, students could then use their theory to offer a reading—in an interpretive textual analysis essay or a critical book review, for example—of their novel.

As Appleman (2015) suggests, “The purpose of teaching literary theory [. . .] is to encourage adolescents to inhabit theories comfortably enough to construct their own readings and to learn to appreciate the power of multiple perspectives” (p. 8). What better way to make that happen than to create the conditions for students to theorize a new lens that can illuminate the experiences and perspectives of people—in literature and in life—who not only cross borders, but who, as Gloria Anzaldúa (2012) so eloquently put it, can exist “on both shores at once and, at once, see through serpent and eagle eyes” (pp. 100–101)?

SEE ALSO

Engle, M. (2015). *Enchanted air: A memoir*. New York, NY: Atheneum Books for Young Readers.

This poetic memoir tells the story of the author’s childhood and coming of age as a Cuban American girl torn between two cultures during the Cold War. Her efforts to reconcile the two parts of herself, amidst fierce hostility between the two cultures, are central to the alloy experience.

Hilton, M. (2017). *Full cicada moon*. New York, NY: Puffin.

This historical novel in verse tells the story of Mimi, a Japanese and black seventh grader who moves to Vermont in 1969. The protagonist's experiences as a biracial girl coming of age amidst stereotypes about race and gender provide a poignant example of alloy identity development.

Bowman, A. (2017). *Starfish*. New York, NY: Simon Pulse.

Biracial (Japanese and white) Kiko struggles with depression, social anxiety, and her sense of identity as she leaves her difficult family in the Midwest to tour art schools in California—and discovers who she is. Examining her coming of age through an alloy lens highlights Kiko's quest to define her own identity.

De la Peña, M. (2008). *Mexican Whiteboy*. New York, NY: Delacorte.

Sixteen-year-old Danny is a professional baseball hopeful who struggles with his racial identity—and his sense of masculinity—when he spends a summer with his Mexican father's family. Readers can use an alloy lens to explore Danny's palpable struggle to understand and embrace his biracial identity.

Durrow, H. (2010). *The girl who fell from the sky*. New York, NY: Algonquin.

Biracial (white and black) Rachel moves in with her African-American grandmother, her first time in a mostly black community, after a family tragedy leaves her feeling alone and grief-stricken. An alloy lens brings into focus not only the protagonist's journey to understand her own identity, but the social and familial impact on alloy identities.

McBride, J. (1996). *The color of water*. New York, NY: Penguin.

This best-selling memoir weaves together the story of the author's childhood with the story of his mother Ruth, who at 17 fled her Orthodox Jewish family in Virginia to settle in New York City, where she married a black minister and went on to have 12 children. The unraveling of Ruth's story, and the author's understanding of how it impacted his own growing up, provides a complex portrait for examination through an alloy lens.

REFERENCES

- Appleman, D. (2015). *Critical encounters in secondary English: Teaching literary theory to adolescents*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Anzaldúa, G. (2012). *Borderlands/La frontera: The new mestiza*. San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute.
- Anzaldúa, G. (2015). Geographies of selves—reimagining identity: nos/otras (us/other), las nepantleras, and the new tribalism. In *Light in the dark/Luz en lo oscuro: Rewriting identity, spirituality, reality* (pp. 65–94). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Colbert, B. (2017). *Little & lion*. New York, NY: Little, Brown.
- Donnella, L. (2016). *What do we call people of multiple backgrounds?* National Public Radio. Retrieved from www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2016/08/25/455470334/all-mixed-up-what-do-we-call-people-of-multiple-backgrounds.

- Livingston, G. (2017, June 6). *The rise of multiracial and multiethnic babies in the US*. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/06/06/the-rise-of-multiracial-and-multiethnic-babies-in-the-u-s/.
- New York Times. (2008, April 2). Being multiracial in America. *NYTimes.com*. Retrieved from www.youtube.com/watch?v=21H9IA6MLHM.
- Root, M. P. P. (1996). *Bill of rights for people of mixed heritage*. Blurring the Lines. Retrieved from www.washington.edu/alumni/columns/dec96/blurring5.html.
- Root, M. P. P. (2003). Multiracial families and children: Implications for educational research and practice. In J. A. Banks & C. A. McGee (Eds.), *Handbook of research on multicultural education* (pp. 110–124). San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- Velasquez-Manoff, M. (2017, March 4). What biracial people know. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from www.nytimes.com/2017/03/04/opinion/sunday/what-biracial-people-know.html.

Borders and Borderlands

Interrogating Real and Imagined Third Spaces Using *If I Ever Get Out of Here*

Ricki Ginsberg

Geographers began to use *border* as a key word following Ratzel's (1899) publication, which defined and conceived of borders as "fuzzy" by nature. He wrote, "No people can prevent all elements of its culture to trespass the national borders" (p. 271). Ratzel's notion of spatially flexible borders was later exploited politically and used to justify violence and expansion during World War II (Paasi, 1996). Borders are highly political and invite varied responses among people. Some promote a "borderless world" (Spivak, 2016), while others perceive borders to be critical politically, geographically, and socially (Starr, 2006). The study of borders and borderlands in their many forms offers opportunities for reflection about processes, social institutions, and mobility and also understandings of how group memberships may be "hermetically sealed or spatially fixed" (Paasi, 1996, p. 478). Examining conceptions of borders allows for considerations of how and why capital and information cross and exist between borders. For instance, immigrants, refugees, and displaced people may cross borders in inequitable ways depending on their circumstances, homelands, and other socially valued factors.

Because spaces are bounded both physically and metaphorically, life may be experienced differently within the borderlands, or the third spaces that exist between two seemingly bounded spaces. Anzaldúa (2012) describes her experiences as a "border woman" on a borderland: "The Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle, and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy" (Preface). She continues, "Living on borders and in margins, keeping intact one's shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an 'alien' element." Anzaldúa advances the existence of a border culture along the US–Mexican border and describes the resulting third space as "the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country," in which the "prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants" (Preface). For Anzaldúa, the

racial and class factors that accompany colonialism have psychological effects. Just as the border divides the land, it can divide the individual spirit. Saldívar (1991) adds to the conversation in conceiving of this as a “place of hybridity and *betweenness* in our global borderlands composed of historically disconnected postcolonial spaces” (p. 153).

Anzaldúa’s conceptions of borders give fodder for classroom conversations about group memberships and *betweenness*. The world comprises countless borders—some obvious and some not—which exist in our everyday lives and influence our identities. Borders have long been connected to conceptions of “belonging” (Cohen, 1986), allowing for considerations of whether borderlands complicate or limit, expand or augment, a sense of belonging.

IF I EVER GET OUT OF HERE AS FOCAL TEXT

Using borders and borderlands as a critical approach for instruction offers a multitude of real-world, authentic connections. Eric Gansworth’s (2013) *If I Ever Get Out of Here* is one potential text readers might use to study borders and borderlands as they connect with notions of group membership, culture, tradition, and sovereignty. In this section, I focus on the physical and emotional spaces of the borderland as they connect to the main character, Lewis “Shoe” Blake. Table 6.1 offers parallel topics related to borderlands evidenced in this text that students might also explore.

Lewis lives on the Tuscarora Indian reservation and attends a predominantly white school. He exists in a type of borderland because he is proverbially caught between two worlds, which he compares to “Venus and Mars, impossibly far apart” (p. 138). Lewis keeps his two worlds separate and lies to his white friends to prevent them from seeing his home. He exists in an isolated state on this borderland and describes how he yearns for his two worlds to exist in more unified ways. In one example from the text, he visits his white friend George’s house and thinks, “He opened a door for me and I wanted to return the favor. If I wanted to keep this friend, I was going to have to meet the expectations of exchange in some way. But more than that, I wanted to have him here, to show him my world such as it was” (p. 70). Lewis quickly recognizes that this dream to invite George to his home is wishful thinking, wondering to himself, “What was I thinking—that I could have George over to play Whack-A-Mutt with me?” (p. 71). Instead, he continues to lie, at one point pretending that his mother is a spiritual healer who needs to maintain purity (devoid of white people) in his house. He describes the feeling of lying: “I said [it], getting sicker with each shovelful I dug myself deeper into this story” (p. 162).

As Lewis learns more about George, he learns more about himself. He recognizes that their lives are more different than he initially perceived them to be. For instance, he reflects on his adventures on the reservation: “Only in hanging out with George in his quieter, regular-kid world did I start to appreciate the weird and rare things I’d taken for granted my whole life”

■ **TABLE 6.1** Other Opportunities for Students to Explore Borderlands within the Text

Perspectives and Considerations of Borders and Borderlands	Related Quotation from the Text
Borders within borders	"The state had taken a big chunk of the reservation because it could, no matter how much we said we were a separate and free nation jammed inside of New York" (p. 223).
Power and constraint across borders	"Well, this is America, and I know you reservation kids think you're from someplace other than America, but for seven hours a day you live in America, <i>my</i> America, where every man gets to face his accusers and defend himself" (p. 226).
Displacing communities in borderlands	"And with that, Innis ran over to the section of the fire hall where all the other Indians were sitting, so it looked like a mini-reservation" (p. 299).
Degrees of freedom for border-crossings	"The way my uncle explained it to me is that we're like those seagulls you see in the gorge, fishing in the river. Sometimes they land on this side of the gorge, sometimes the other. They live on both sides" (p. 141).
Intricacies of border definitions	"Mrs. Tunny was a white woman who married an influential reservation man. She was good-natured with us reservation kids, even though our strict way of defining who is Indian and who isn't had a major effect on her family. Her kids had a reservation last name, but they were considered white. They couldn't go to the reservation school with us and joined us only when we reached junior high" (p. 222).

(p. 80). Lewis's description of George's world as "regular-kid" demonstrates that he sees himself as a not-regular-kid. As he becomes closer with George, he realizes that others in the school and on the reservation do not accept their friendship. Carson, a friend from the reservation, says, "I knew as soon as you started hanging out with that white kid, you'd think you were too good to hang with Indians anymore. What are you going to do, marry him like all these assholes around here who knock up white women?" (p. 86). Lewis experiences resistance from the white students, as well. About a bully named Evan, Lewis says, "'He hates Indians,' I said, and knew, as soon as I'd said it, that my classmates would not believe me. [. . .] I'd been dumped off every day among the white people and forced to find my own way out, encountering indifferent teachers, isolation, and now active violence from Evan. Wild Indians on a reservation had nothing on a mostly white junior high in the way of scariness" (p. 207). Although Lewis knows that he is not welcome in his school, he also describes the trouble his white friends might encounter if they crossed borders. He admits, "I knew people who, if they found a white teenage guy wandering down Snakeline, would take the opportunity to educate him about borders. He'd know intimately the places where one territory left off

and another began” (p. 209). For Lewis, the world is made up of boundaries and territories. His existence on the borderland brings feelings of isolation, discomfort, and violent bullying.

With time, Lewis becomes more, but not completely, comfortable with his existence on the borderland between the two worlds. He accompanies George and George’s father to a concert. As he stands among strangers, he feels a “surging excitement” that he is “one of them” and compares the experience to “being home on the reservation.” But then he looks over the edge and cannot see George and George’s dad in the crowd. He considers, “They were a distance of thirty rows away, half a hockey rink, fewer than fifteen feet from the stage, within eye contact range of the band. I couldn’t have asked for a more perfect reminder of the different planets where George and I lived. The feeling was sharp, like a pebble in my foot” (p. 156). Lewis’s brief comfort as he travels across the Canadian border and seemingly far from the borderland between the school and reservation provides him with initial comfort. Yet, as he looks for George and his dad, he is painfully reminded of the great distance that exists between his and George’s worlds—the distance extends beyond the space between the school and reservation. The borderland is much greater than this physical space—and traveling to Canada does not eliminate its impact.

Lewis begins to find comfort in George’s house, and he visits often. When his mother asks how George’s family knows so much about him, he responds with anger: “He knows all my favorite foods because, in the last year, I have probably sat down to more meals with that family than I have with my own. [. . .] And if they ever invited me, I might even consider moving in with them, but I don’t think I’m ever getting out of here, so don’t worry about it” (p. 309). Lewis’s words signify his yearning for a sense of belonging in George’s world, yet he feels that he will never be able to leave the reservation permanently. He immediately regrets his comments to his family, particularly when his uncle Albert says, “I told you you’d change once you saw how that half lived. [. . .] You didn’t believe me before. I hate to tell you, but that road only goes one way. You can’t turn around” (p. 310). Struggling with Albert’s words, Lewis thinks, “I wanted to try to navigate both planets, making choices within both worlds, not have to choose one to love and one to hate” (p. 311). Lewis and his uncle share powerful insights about the potential for navigating two worlds and finding comfort in third spaces.

IDENTIFYING AND INTERROGATING NOTIONS OF BORDERS AND BORDERLANDS

In the exploration of borders and borderlands, students might begin by creating their own definitions of these concepts and considering how we can expand and interrogate our notions of them. Students might identify and categorize, for example, the types of borders that exist—real or imagined—and how these

are connected to their lives. Considerations of less traditional borders, such as those students might imagine in their minds, allow for attention to the many borders that exist in their everyday worlds. Naming and analyzing a wide range of borders offers space for critique of the ways in which borders are socially constructed, such as in traditional conceptions of binaries and borders (e.g., with sexuality or gender).

Students might also consider whether borders are fixed or moving, real or imagined, fragmenting or strengthening. These discussions can be connected with discussions of relevant political topics, such as immigration. Using strategies of critical literacy, teachers might ask students to read opposing newspaper articles from different sources to consider divergent viewpoints about whether borders fragment or strengthen countries. This type of critical media literacy allows for a quest for truth. This conversation can serve in connection with the borders that exist in *If I Ever Get Out of Here* or with other focal texts, like those in the “See Also” box below. With this critical approach, readers might consider whether borders are positive and/or negative influences on how we conceive of and define culture. These discussions connect deeply with political issues and offer great potential for stronger understandings of the world.

EXAMINING BORDERS IN POLITICS: INDIGENOUS LANDS AND SOVEREIGNTY

In order for students to act as critical citizens, they must have an understanding of political and law-based decision-making, particularly how it relates to borders and borderlands. To begin to develop this knowledge, students might evaluate sanctions placed on immigrants along the United States–Mexico border. Interrogating the decisions of political leaders and judges allows for extended awareness of the world and fosters potential for agency and activism. Another prospective area of study related to borders and politics—and connected with the focal text of this chapter—includes examinations of Native lands and Indigenous sovereignty.

A Brief History of Indigenous Lands and Sovereignty

For Indigenous people, borders are significant and have historically been points of tension for tribal nations within the United States and across international borders. Since the formation of the United States, settlers have aggressively sought access to aboriginal lands. Because territoriality is the one irreducible element of settler colonialism, the “settler colonial tendency is inherently eliminatory” (Wolfe, 2006, p. 387). Wolfe (2006) terms this tendency the “logic of elimination,” which seeks both the dissolution of Native peoples and the formation of a new settler society on the expropriated land base (p. 388). Rather than invading in a single event, settler colonialism is more structural in its employment of an array of strategies intended to gain access to territory.

One strategy is “breaking down Native title into alienable individual freeholds” (Wolfe, 2006, p. 388).

In the 1823 US Supreme Court case, *Johnson v. McIntosh*, Native title rights were diminished (via the discovery doctrine), which gave the United States the exclusive right to extinguish the original Native right of possession “by purchase or conquest” (Getches, Wilkinson, Williams, & Fletcher, 2011, p. 70). The federal government (the settlers) was then legally positioned to establish a monopoly (preemption) over Native land transactions and hence, land title.

In what Wunder (1994) termed *New Colonialism*, legislation passed during the allotment and assimilation era sought to aggressively assimilate Natives into white society via genocidal policies to break down tribalism and federal policies to gain more access to Native land title (e.g., forced Indian boarding school policies and the Dawes Act). The passage of the Dawes Act in 1887 decreased tribally held lands by two thirds. In 1887, tribal land holdings totaled 138,000,000 acres; this was reduced to 48,000,000 by 1934 when the Indian Reorganization Act finally ended the Allotment Era (Getches et al., 2011, p. 171). The 1887 Dawes Act served two purposes: it opened more land to white settlement and sought to end tribalism. This later led to the introduction of blood quantum requirements, which employed yet another strategy to statistically and legally eliminate Natives (Wolfe, 2006).

Tribal Sovereignty and Connection to Borders and Politics

Native nations exercising tribal sovereignty often name how territory, boundaries, and borders are linked to political, legal, historical, and cultural knowledge and traditions. Sovereign nations have their own unique cultures, languages, histories, and places (Biolsi, 2005). Federally recognized tribal nations in the United States exercise an inherent right to govern themselves, and given their accompanying borders, logically connect well with studies of borders.

Conceptions of sovereignty and Native lands, however, are largely misunderstood and ignored. These misunderstandings have led to debates regarding political issues, like the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), which has mobilized “everyday people in defense of Native sovereignty, self-determination, and treaty rights” (Estes, 2017, p. 120). Capitalism exploits Indigenous lands and resources and connects historically to colonialist attempts to control the “Indian Problem.” This has generated an activist response, as evidenced by #NoDAPL (Estes, 2017).

Teachers might support students in developing stronger understandings of Native lands and sovereignty to develop deeper understandings of how and why borders matter for Native people and for all people. One opportunity for further exploration of these topics might include reading a series of newspaper articles and debates about political issues that connect with Native sovereignty. Examinations of the connections between borders, Indigenous lands, and sovereignty offers one example of how students might consider the intersections of political decisions related to borders.

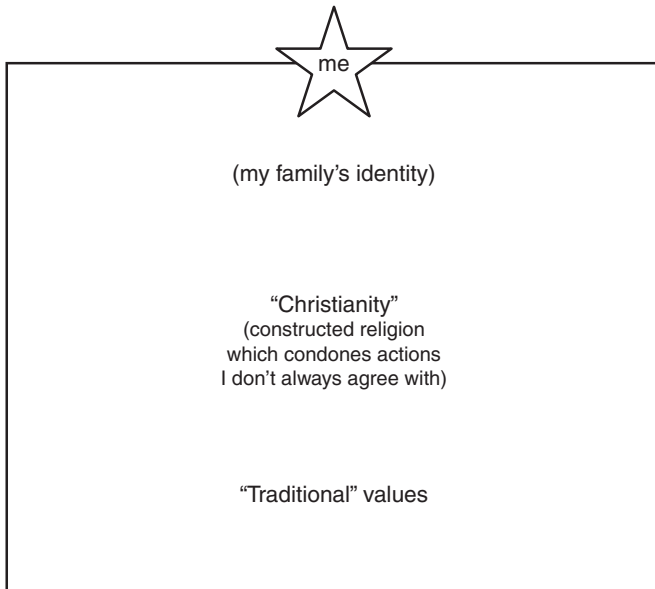
THE BORDERLANDS AND THIRD SPACES WE INHABIT

As a concluding activity, students might explore the borderlands that exist within their lives. Teachers might begin by inviting students to generate collaboratively as a whole class a list of potential borderlands. This allows students to see the myriad third spaces—many of which are vastly different—that we inhabit. Some borders are created by others, while others we create ourselves. Some accompany positive experiences, while others can feel insurmountable, emotionally difficult, and taxing.

Students might then draw a visual depiction of the third spaces, the borderlands, that they occupy or have occupied that have been significant in their lives. As they draw the borderlands they inhabit(ed), they might consider group memberships in relation to these third spaces. Teachers can invite student volunteers to share and describe their experiences on borderlands with their peers. As a reminder, some students may experience discomfort (personally or culturally) with activities related to identity because many cultures are collectivist and do not primarily focus on the self. This activity is better framed in connection with discussions of group memberships rather than a focus on identity.

The examples that follow illustrate student work that has emerged from this activity. In Figure 6.1, the student placed herself on a border in a borderland

Education on the problematic tendencies of Christians/a more
loving (not shaming) view of God/rebellious nature

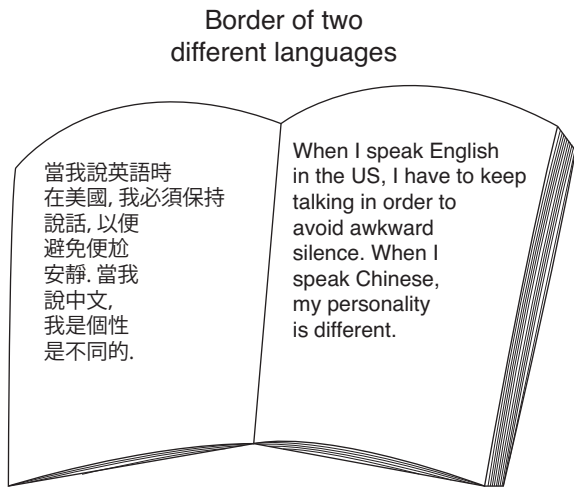


■ **FIGURE 6.1** Digitalized Replication of Student Drawing of Religious Borderland

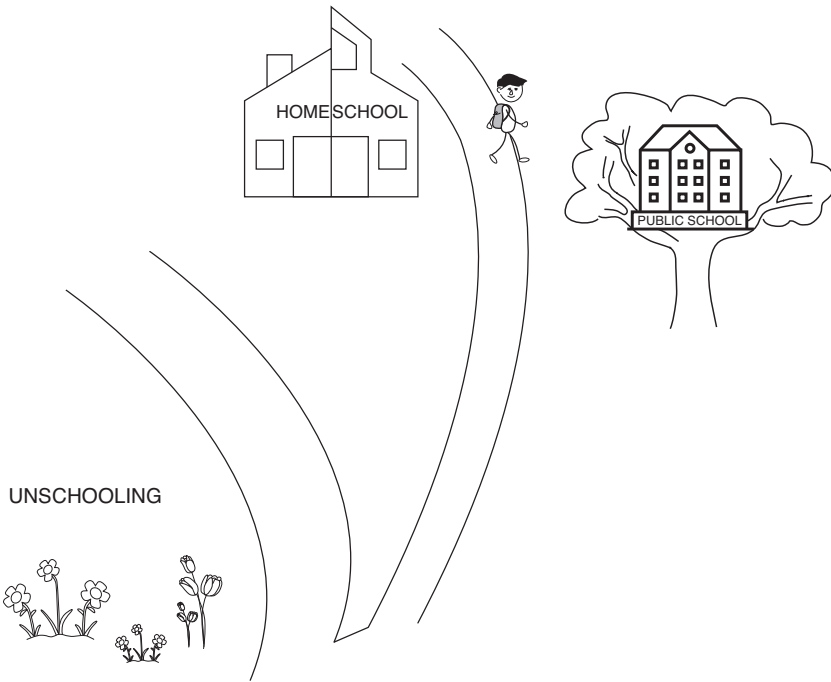
where she was both separate from her family and from the words that she wrote outside of the box. Within the box, she saw her family and their beliefs grounded in Christianity, a religion she perceived to hold traditional values that condone actions with which she did not always agree. Outside of the box, she imagined her education as working against the problematic tendencies that she saw in Christians, who she believed to have a shaming rather than loving view of God. She labeled this outside section as “rebellious.”

Another student drew Figure 6.2 to illustrate the borderland she inhabited as a bilingual person who speaks Chinese and English. She presented her drawing to the class and shared that she has two different personalities, dependent on the language that she is speaking at any given time. She said that when she speaks English, she strives to avoid awkward silences, yet when she speaks Chinese, she is more reserved. The student illustrated these two spaces as two pages of a book. The book is a metaphorical page spread of herself, and she said she was unsure about which page of the book represented her more genuine personality.

A third student perceived multiple borders in her life related to her schooling. In the corner of her drawing, she drew “unschooling.” When she presented the drawing, Figure 6.3, to the class, she said that this was a group with which she did not identify, so she placed it far away from her borderland. Instead, she drew herself on the border between homeschooling and public schooling. She discussed the impact of homeschooling on her life and described her current, uneasy existence on a borderland. Her experiences as a homeschooled child made her feel as if she did not fit in with the majority of her peers who attended public schools, but she felt far away from her former homeschooling peers.



■ **FIGURE 6.2** Digitalized Replication of Student Drawing of Language Borderland



■ **FIGURE 6.3** Digitalized Replication of Student Drawing of Schooling Borderland

Other student examples from this class included:

- a student who self-identifies as bisexual and drew herself on a borderland between heterosexuality and homosexuality;
- a student who depicted himself on the outside of a barbed wire, fenced-in area that contained the label, “White people, yo”;
- a student who drew arrows and continuums to represent the borderlands of physical fitness and mental health;
- a student who depicted herself on a borderland between childhood and adulthood;
- a student who saw herself on borderland of being both Jewish and Asian;
- a student who drew his borderland as a border within a border and defined his pride with his progressive state but lack of pride with the United States as a whole;
- a student who drew himself on the border of Japan and the USA and included outsider questions or statements like, “Where are you really from? You don’t have an accent. Your Japanese isn’t good enough.”;
- a student who existed on a borderland between a space of pre-service teacher peers and another space of friends who reached a hand into her borderland and compelled her to do dangerous drugs;

- and a student who drew layered borders around himself in a self-imposed borderland that kept people “psychically and physically” out of his world.

Across examples, students differed in how they visualized their third spaces. Some students sought to exit the borderland and enter into one of the two groups that they drew, others saw themselves firmly within the borderland between the two groups, and still others saw themselves as connected to groups they did not prefer. They discussed how their existence within these borderlands connected deeply and intrinsically with a complicated sense of belonging in connection with group memberships.

Critical analyses of borders and borderlands allows for investigations of the many complications that come with how we navigate the world. By exploring diverse manifestations of borders—more traditional geopolitical borders through more abstract borders within the mind—students are able to consider the role that borders may play in their own lives, in their group memberships, and in the world.

SEE ALSO

Abdel-Fattah, R. (2017). *The lines we cross*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

Michael attends anti-immigration group meetings with his parents, but his life becomes much more complicated when he falls in love with Mina, a Muslim refugee from Afghanistan. Michael and Mina are seemingly part of two different worlds and spaces, yet they create a borderland together, a third space which powerfully resists the hate that they experience due to their relationship.

Sáenz, B.A. (2012). *Aristotle and Dante discover the secrets of the universe*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Aristotle is an angry teen who does not have friends until he meets Dante, an unusual boy who teaches him about friendship, life, and loyalty. The two navigate borderlands related to sexuality, nationality, social class, and bilingualism/biculturalism. This is a book in which the characters exist in in-between spaces and break down assumptions about group memberships.

Pan, E.X.R. (2018). *The astonishing color of after*. New York, NY: Little, Brown.

When Leigh’s mother commits suicide, she is devastated. She finds hope and solace when she is visited by her mother in the form of a bird, urging her to travel to Taiwan to meet her maternal grandparents. Not only does her mother exist in a third space between life and death, but Leigh exists in several borderlands, as well, as she struggles with her multiracial identity, language ability, and potential love of her best friend.

Thomas, A. (2017). *The hate u give*. New York, NY: Balzer + Bray.

Starr Carter navigates two worlds: a poor neighborhood where she lives and the affluent school that she attends. When her childhood best friend is murdered, she exists on a borderland between remaining quiet as an observer or speaking out about her friend's death.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Special thanks to Roe Bubar, J.D., for her insight and suggestions related to Native law.

REFERENCES

- Anzaldúa, G. (2012). *Borderlands/La frontera: The new mestiza* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books.
- Biolsi, T. (2005). Imagined geographies: Sovereignty, indigenous space, and American Indian struggle. *American Ethnologist*, 32(2), 239–259.
- Cohen, A. P. (1986). *Symbolizing boundaries*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
- Estes, N. (2017). Fighting for our lives: #NoDAPL in historical context. *Wicazo Sa Review*, 32(2), 115–122.
- Gansworth, E. (2013). *If I ever get out of here*. New York, NY: Arthur A. Levine.
- Getches, D. H., Wilkinson, C. F., Williams, Jr., R. A., & Fletcher, M. L. (2011). *Cases and materials on federal Indian law*. Aboriginal Policy Research Consortium International (APRCi). Retrieved from <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1231&context=aprci>.
- Paasi, A. (1996). Borders and border-crossings. In N. C. Johnson, R. H. Schein, & J. Winders (Eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell companion to cultural geography* (pp. 478–493). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Ratzel, F. (1899). *Anthropogeographie*. Stuttgart, Germany: J. Engelhorn.
- Saldívar, J. D. (1991). *The dialectics of our America: Genealogy, cultural critique, and literary history*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Spivak, G. C. (2016). A borderless world. In R. Braidotti, & P. Gilroy (Eds.), *Conflict-ing humanities* (pp. 47–60). New York, NY: Bloomsbury.
- Starr, H. (2006). International borders: What they are, what they mean, and why we should care. *SAIS Review of International Affairs*, 26(1), 3–10.
- Wolfe, P. (2006). Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native. *Journal of Genocidal Research*, 8(4), 387–409.
- Wunder, J. R. (1994). *“Retained by the people”: A history of American Indians and the Bill of Rights*. New York, NY: Oxford.

Understanding Racial Melancholia

Analyzing Race-Related Losses and Opportunities for Mourning through *American Born Chinese*

Sophia Tatiana Sarigianides

Gene Luen Yang, author of the critically acclaimed graphic novel, *American Born Chinese* (*ABC*) (2007a), has worried over the ways that readers interpret the explicit racism in his novel. In shaping Chin-kee, his caricature of American racism toward Asians, Yang (2007b) intended that readers laugh at the character “with a knot in their stomachs” (p. 12). Yet, Yang knows that some readers merely laugh at Chin-kee’s antics, reinforcing the racism he aimed to critique through this character. Like other texts featuring the stories of characters of color, *ABC* benefits from—and in a highly racialized and racist US, may *require*—a robust critical lens to help some readers see and understand the complex critique of racism rendered through the narrative. Without it, seemingly innocuous and common American expectations of cultural (and racial) assimilation for Asians are not seen as the racist sources of ineffable suffering they are. The psychoanalytic concept of racial melancholia helps students better understand how Yang’s entire novel exposes the workings of whiteness that are manifested in Asians in America to cause this suffering. At stake in understanding the workings of racial melancholia is the dire need for a public language to name the complex processes effecting this suffering for people in nonmajoritarian groups, to validate it, and to give shape to a means to push back against it and offer relief from its psychological hold.

Yang’s graphic novel proves especially fruitful for understanding racial melancholia because of his narrative structure that splits one story into three seemingly separate ones, as well as the graphic components of his text that allow us to see some of the effects of whiteness visually. But the psychoanalytic concept of racial melancholia also helps to understand characters in other texts, as well as the experiences of students themselves. Additionally, since this concept applies to groups minoritized because of gender, sexuality, or colonialism, its applications are far-reaching.

THEORETICAL CONCEPT OR CRITICAL APPROACH

Racial melancholia names and explains the psychological effects of systemic oppression—here, racism via whiteness—on the lives and bodies of people of minoritized groups—here, Asian Americans. Taking Freud’s conceptualizations of mourning and melancholia and extending them to the experiences of marginalized groups, Eng and Han (2003) explain how people in nondominant groups are coerced into losses of cherished identities and identifications because they do not “fit in” to dominant society.

Freud (1917/1953) himself identified melancholia as the ongoing, pathological state of suffering of individuals who cannot mourn a deep loss, even extending this feeling of loss to abstract entities like one’s homeland as candidates for melancholic attachment. In naming racial melancholia as the ongoing state of suffering by individuals who are part of nonmajority groups (e.g., people of color, those who identify as LGBTQ, people who hold post-colonial identities, women) who cannot mourn the loss of cherished identities (e.g., of their race, their homeland), losses which have been thrust upon them by society’s normative expectations, Eng and Han extend Freud’s analysis. By identifying the source of such losses and subsequent suffering as based in cultural norms, Eng and Han shift the site of the problem to the norms of the dominant society—making it a cultural problem, rather than an individual one.

Racial melancholia involves a range of complex responses to socially coerced loss, including the internalization and identification with those characteristics or attachments that subjects feel they can no longer bear in a public sense. The strong identification with a disparaged cultural trait forces subjects to simultaneously cherish and despise the identities they are born with and cannot choose. Unable to grieve the object as one that is socially valued or worthy of mourning, individuals internalize the love object or identity and suffer its loss indefinitely. Now that the individually cherished but culturally devalued object has been internalized, individuals experience any disparagement toward the demeaned identity as an insult or attack on the self. The effects of this unending, socially coerced loss generate a deep sense of ambivalence toward oneself, which may present as possible unavowed rage (Eng, 2000, p. 1279) about its state of impossibility and/or the potential for literal or metaphoric suicide—what Eng calls “racial self-erasure” (p. 1279).

Without a public language for naming this process of socially coerced suffering, individuals experiencing racial melancholia feel its effects as individual failure to conform; suffer indefinitely from the ambivalence generated toward the losses and the self; fear the “ghostly return” of the loved object that remains forever within oneself; and miss out on a platform for pushing against society’s unachievable norms. (For a more detailed explanation of racial melancholia, with ample literary and clinical examples, see Eng, 2000; Eng & Han, 2003; Freud, 1917/1953).

APPLYING RACIAL MELANCHOLIA TO AMERICAN BORN CHINESE

The effects of racial melancholia could not be more clearly illuminated than in Yang's *ABC*. A narrative split into three seemingly distinct stories that come together through an amazing string of surprising reveals, Yang's novel features the stories of the Monkey King of China, Asian American Jin, and white high school student Danny. In each storyline, the protagonist struggles with fitting into a group from which he has been shut out for reasons tied to who that character is physically (e.g., the Monkey King's lack of footwear and smell) and/or culturally (e.g., Jin's Asian identity and eating of Chinese food). Each protagonist responds to this othering through achieving greater accomplishments (e.g., the Monkey King's achievement of new disciplines of the body), assimilating (e.g., the Monkey King asking his disciples to wear shoes and Jin perming his hair), and for some, violence (e.g., the Monkey King's battles against the gods and Tze-Yo-Tzuh and Danny against Chin-kee).

For each protagonist, these efforts prove futile in effecting inroads to the majoritarian group they seek to join. Monkey King never enters the Kingdom of the Gods. Jin cannot seem to date white Amelia. And white Danny cannot shake the shame attached to his Asian cousin Chin-kee's annual visit to his home and school. Only after characters release themselves from "disciplines" that keep them bound within efforts to fit into dominant groups—the Monkey King shape-shifting back into a monkey and white Danny shape-shifting back into Asian Jin—do the characters begin to engage in actions that heal them of their suffering and help them find their place, honorably, within their initially loved cultural and racial identities.

The concept of racial melancholia illuminates the central conflicts and resolutions of all these main characters, as well as those of some of the secondary characters. Focusing here on Jin, we know that before he moved to the white suburbs and when he lived in San Francisco's Chinatown, he "fit in" well with his Asian peers, speaking Mandarin, playing and watching "Transformers," and accepting each other's Asian American identities. On his first day at a predominantly white school, however, his othering by white peers and teachers begins, othering that we can see as a series of racial microaggressions directed at him as an "Asian" boy. His name is mispronounced, his prior abode is misdirected to China, and he is accused of eating dog meat for lunch. Rather than correct or educate students about these racist acts, the white teachers exacerbate them. And rather than seek the commiseration of other Asian students suffering the same rebukes, Jin shuns such opportunities for solace to better ensure the possibility of less censure from his white (male) peers. He also attempts to "fit in" by taking on symbols of whiteness, as when he perms his straight hair to look more like curly blonde-haired Greg, a boy who seems to perform masculinity well enough to withstand rebuke from white male bullies and to succeed socially with white girls.

When this level of assimilation does not suffice, Jin turns white. While this transformation would typically be rendered metaphorically, in this graphic novel, it is a literal transformation achieved successfully through the splitting of the larger narrative into three seemingly distinct stories. Asian Jin becomes white Danny. But Jin's/Danny's suffering does not end with this "racial self-erasure" into whiteness. Instead, since he has internalized his Chinese identity, he still suffers rebukes toward Asians as rebukes toward himself. So even after turning white, Danny forever registers the anxiety of being seen through the "ghost" of racist stereotypes of Asians through Chin-kee's annual visits to him. Yang demonstrates this anxiety in his depiction of the study date scene with Melanie. Just when Danny is about to ask her out, Chin-kee, who is depicted as larger than life, bounds into the scene with Chinese takeout-shaped luggage, salivating over Melanie. Danny confesses this worry to his basketball teammate, informing him that he has changed schools repeatedly in efforts to flee the effects of "Chin-kee"—of racist expectations of himself as "Asian."

Only after Jin/Danny punches Chin-kee head-on—attacks the stereotypes directly—does he begin to move toward mourning his losses as an Asian in the US. In Yang's hands, mourning one's losses involves subversively repeating (Butler, 1990/1999, 1997) the identity that has been socially disparaged. Yang depicts this subversive repetition when we see Jin in a post-script image pictured as though in a YouTube-like screen, head back with eyes closed, performing a song wearing a Yao Ming jersey with Wei-Chen supporting his efforts behind him. Here, Jin is once again unselfconscious in his identity performance, now a mixture of Americanized Asianness exemplified by donning the jersey of a beloved Chinese NBA star. Additionally, when we see Jin losing himself in song in this image, it represents a subversive repetition of the widely mocked *American Idol* audition by William Huang—repeated by Chin-kee in the library scene when he sings "She Bang" atop a table to the horror of Jin/Danny and white schoolmates (p. 203). Through the public dialogue made possible by the circulation of this novel—and the complicated conversation afforded by understandings of racial melancholia—the socially coerced suffering of marginalized groups like that of Asians in the US takes on a public, political forum to begin the work of necessary mourning of losses. (See Sarigianides, 2017 for a more extended application of racial melancholia to this novel.)

TEACHING STUDENTS THE CONCEPT OF RACIAL MELANCHOLIA

Teaching the concept of racial melancholia poses challenges but can result in complex understandings that open up this text, other books, and real-world incidents for students. There are many ways to help students understand the workings of the concept and see its applications in the novel. The suggestions that follow are offered roughly in the order in which educators might consider utilizing them to scaffold the concept and application to texts.

Reading

Read the novel once to appreciate the complex narrative structure, plot, and character twists, as well as the visual intricacies of the images, allowing students' initial thematic interpretations to emerge.

ABC bears re-reading, especially if students are to appreciate the visual details that need unpacking (see Schieble, 2014), but also to allow the common, problematic interpretation of Jin's conflict as one of needing to "just accept himself" to be happy. Before re-reading the novel, explain the concept of racial melancholia. There is no easy text available that explains this concept. Teachers will need to engage in some lecturing, explaining key features of melancholia juxtaposed to mourning and then extending those ideas to racial melancholia. I recommend Eng and Han (2003) to see a range of literary and clinical examples of Asians' experiences of socially coerced suffering in the US.

Exploring Supplementary Texts

Use additional texts to illuminate facets of racial melancholia. Henkes's (1991) children's book, *Chrysanthemum*, renders a clear, partial view of racial melancholia by telling the story of a young mouse's loss of her identity through the mockery of her name. Details to note include: Chrysanthemum's initial adoration of her name that her family chose with love; the devaluation of her name at school by peers; Chrysanthemum's initial suffering due to loss (her first nightmare); the reinforcement of her name's beauty by her parents (while reading self-help books to guide them); further devaluation of her name by peers at school (noting schools as the site of abjection and othering of students here as well as in *ABC*); further suffering (second nightmare); distancing from the social (not wanting to go to school); opportunities for mourning (beloved, pregnant substitute teacher's name of Delphinium and naming of her baby Chrysanthemum). Ask students which facets of racial melancholia they recognize and which are absent and why that might be in a children's book. This gap may open students' inquiries into how *ABC* represents this set of experiences in more complex ways.

At the end of Ta-Nehisi Coates's (2015) book-length letter to his son, *Between the World and Me*, he identifies an effect of systemic racism in the US for black people: "We have made something down here. We have taken the one-drop rules of the Dreamers and flipped them. They made us into a race. We made ourselves into a people" (149). Here, Coates identifies the ineffable sense of community experienced between black people who do not even know each other, who need not explain their connections in a country that despises and perennially threatens the black body. Racial melancholia helps to explain the many losses that Coates identifies for black people in the US; his fury and sadness at these coerced effects for blacks; and the sense of communal identity forged under the duress of this set of psychological processes.

Looking to Media

Share examples of racial melancholia from the media to show how this concept works in real situations. On October 9, 2016, *The New York Times* deputy Metro editor, Michael Luo, published an open letter to the white woman who yelled and cursed at him and his family for occupying too much of the sidewalk on their exit from church services. This letter, together with the video (Woo & Al-Hlou, 2016) produced to document the flood of responses by other Asians in the US with similar experiences of social devaluation, works well to help students see real-world examples of racial melancholia. Details to note in the letter and video include the many racial microaggressions suffered by Asians in the US, regardless of the extent to which they have assimilated into dominant culture (as evident by the careful captioning of each video participant's name and job).

Engaging in Personal Writing

Invite personal writing about racial melancholia. While remaining careful not to expose the vulnerabilities of already-marginalized students, invite students to consider ways that they or people they care about might have had to give up—and feel pressure to get over—nonmajoritarian identities (e.g., as queer, as “overly” ethnic, as native speakers of a language other than English). To what extent do they recognize facets of mourning or racial melancholia in their responses? How might it feel to understand that these are socially coerced losses? That attempting to preserve them through refusing to mourn them could be seen as dignified, a sign of love for this prized identity, even while experiencing suffering?

Digging into the Novel

Explain the various effects of racial melancholia, matching each effect or feature with its manifestation in *ABC*. Teachers can select key images from the text, focusing on Jin's experiences, using each scene to explain key facets of racial melancholia. Some suggested ideas to unpack include: initial attachment to the love object (e.g., Asian identity); social devaluation of love object (e.g., mocking his food); a turning inward, away from the social (e.g., lonely lunch images); efforts to assimilate (e.g., Jin's permed hair); a social coercion to identify with the devalued love object (e.g., still seen as *overly* Asian at school; see p. 96); efforts to assimilate/self-erasure (e.g., turning into white Danny); continued coercion into identifying with reviled identity (e.g., regular arrival of Chin-kee and the embodiment of racist Asian stereotypes); and efforts to mourn losses (e.g., returns to being Asian Jin, seeks out Wei-Chen, sings out about his identity while wearing a Yao Ming jersey). Encourage students to analyze the Monkey King's scenes—and even white Danny's—for examples of racial melancholia as well.

Name and explain white racism and show its workings in this novel. Details to emphasize in the novel include: white teachers' unapologetic ignorance and assumptions about Asians in monolithic, racist ways; white students' racist assumptions about Asians left uncorrected by teachers; and the portrayal of Chin-kee as the embodiment of historic and contemporary examples of white racism (see Schieble, 2014).

Special attention ought to be given to at least two key scenes that foreground the role of white masculinity and its role in emasculating and infantilizing Asian males in the US. When Jin arrives at Mayflower Elementary, we see two white boys in the bottom, central frame of p. 31, with half of each boy's face split by the gutter, suggesting that readers see the boys as one, as the same white boy. A few pages later (p. 40), Yang dedicates a full page to showing these same boys in the foreground, dynamically angled as they play football, dressed in sports jerseys and military fatigues. They are depicted in relation to Jin and Wei-chen in the far background, drawn so small as to make facial features indistinct, dressed in pastel colors and playing with a toy, a Transformer. In this image, we see the ways that conventional white American masculinity dominates, emasculates, and infantilizes Asian masculinity.

Additionally, draw attention to the Chinese parable shared by Jin's mom as they drive to his new home. She shares the story of a boy and his mother moving several times. With each move, the mother watches as the boy takes on the behaviors of the environment he enters (e.g., spiritual, mercantile), until finally they move across the road from a university and settle there as the boy begins to study during his free time. Right after this scene, we see Jin and his family drive into a white suburb, indicating that his family purposefully moved out of San Francisco's Chinatown to the white suburbs in order to help Jin acquire whiteness to facilitate his social success.

Extending to Other Texts

Help students see the applications of racial melancholia to other texts. Each section of Ibtisam Barakat's memoir, *Tasting the Sky* (2007) focuses on different facets of loss experienced by a child as Israel occupies Palestine. The back cover of *Tasting* features a key scene in the memoir. Ibtisam's mother tells her, "When a war ends it does not go away. It hides inside us . . . just forget!" "But I do not want to do what mother says . . . I want to remember." This key exchange juxtaposes the difference between her mother's melancholia—the war hides inside us and does not go away, since it references the enormous loss of the Palestinian homeland—and Ibtisam's efforts to mourn these losses through writing these memoirs.

As research studies have shown us repeatedly, the inclusion of texts featuring people of color does not automatically function to broaden students' perspectives about social differences. In fact, such inclusions may actually reinforce existing, problematic views about race and other sites of difference (Groenke et al., 2015). For this reason, taking the time to teach students

complex renderings of the effects of dominant structures onto individuals and minoritized groups not only improves students' interpretations of texts, but may offer some students much-needed solace from suffering.

SEE ALSO

Barakat, I. (2007). *Tasting the sky: A Palestinian childhood*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

A memoir telling the first segment of Barakat's story of her family's need to flee their home in Palestine from Israeli occupation. Though Barakat's mother urges her toward melancholia, the feeling of never being able to forget the effects of war while striving to forget, Barakat herself seeks to mourn these losses of homeland by telling these stories through her memoir.

O'Neill, L. (2016). *Asking for it*. New York, NY: Quercus.

A novel telling the story of the before and after effects on one young woman of a drug-induced gang rape that the perpetrators spread on social media. Before the rape, we see Emma as beautiful, confident, brash, and frustrated by class differences embodied by her wealthier friends. Following the rape and social shaming, the novel details her unraveling from losses to her gender identity as a "good girl."

REFERENCES

- Butler, J. (1990/1999). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1997). *Excitable speech: A politics of the performative*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Coates, T. (2015). *Between the world and me*. New York, NY: Spiegel & Grau.
- Eng, D. L. (2000). Melancholia in the late twentieth century. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 25(4), 1275–1281.
- Eng, D., & Han, S. (2003). A dialogue on racial melancholia. In D. Eng & S. Han (Eds.), *Loss: The politics of mourning* (pp. 343–371). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Freud, S. (1917/1953). Mourning and melancholia. In J. Strachey (Trans. and Ed.), *Standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 14, pp. 243–258). London, UK: Hogarth Press.
- Groenke, S., Haddix, M., Glenn, W. J., Kirkland, D. E., Price-Dennis, D., & Coleman-King, C. (2015). Disrupting and dismantling the dominant vision of youth of color. *English Journal*, 104(3), 35–40.
- Henkes, K. (1991). *Chrysanthemum*. New York, NY: Greenwillow Books.
- Luo, M. (2016, October 9). An open letter to the woman who told my family to go back to China. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from www.nytimes.com/2016/10/10/nyregion/to-the-woman-who-told-my-family-to-go-back-to-china.html.

- Sarigianides, S. T. (2017). "Coerced loss and ambivalent preservation": Racial melancholia in *American Born Chinese*. *Educational Theory*, 67(1), 37–49.
- Schieble, M. (2014). Reading images in *American Born Chinese* through critical visual literacy. *English Journal*, 103(5), 47–52.
- Woo, J., & Al-Hlou, Y. (2016, October 13). #thisis2016: Asian Americans respond. Retrieved from www.nytimes.com/2016/10/10/nyregion/to-the-woman-who-told-my-family-to-go-back-to-china.html.
- Yang, G. L. (2007a). *American born Chinese*. New York, NY: Macmillan.
- Yang, G. L. (2007b). Printz Award winner speech. *Young Adult Library Services*, 6(1), 11–13.

Interrogating Happiness

Unraveling Homophobia in the Lives of Queer Youth of Color with *More Happy than Not*

Alyssa Chrisman and Mollie V. Blackburn

In 2010, Dan Savage and his partner initiated a social media campaign aimed to give hope to struggling LGBTQ¹ youth by stating, “It gets better.” Their message was clear: Although the present may be difficult, happiness will come with time (It Gets Better Project, 2017). Waiting until “it gets better,” however, is insufficient. Homophobic and transphobic abuse have damaging effects on LGBTQ students’ educational success and mental well-being (Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, & Danischewski, 2015; NAMI, 2017). So, while waiting for “it” to get better, students are enduring harm. Moreover, this abuse does not always disappear upon adulthood.

Instead of waiting for life to get better, efforts should be made to improve the lives of LGBTQ youth. Some progress is being made, as indicated by research that shows verbal harassment of LGBTQ students based on sexual orientation and gender expression is declining. This decline is correlated with LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum (Kosciw et al., 2015). While it would make sense for schools to engage LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum, such texts are rarely included, and when they are, instruction is often limited (Blackburn & Schey, 2017; Clark & Blackburn, 2009). Even more concerning is the failure to include intersectional LGBTQ literature that also features people of color and working poor, pedagogical choices that exacerbate the discrimination these LGBTQ youth face. In an effort to change the problematic ideology of “it gets better” and the lack of intersectional LGBTQ curriculum in schools, we examine the potential of using Ahmed’s (2010) conceptualization of *happiness* to teach Silvera’s (2015) young adult novel *More Happy than Not* in secondary English language arts classrooms.

Ahmed (2010) interrogates the imperative to be happy, an ideal that is socially constructed and unattainable for many. She argues that people who deviate from norms are seen as at fault for their lack of happiness and the unhappiness of others. She writes, “The face of happiness [. . .] looks rather like the face of privilege. Rather than assuming happiness is simply found in ‘happy persons,’ we can consider how claims to happiness make certain forms

of personhood valuable” (p. 11) and implicitly other forms not so valuable. Such a construction of happiness, then, is less available to queer people and people of color who live in homophobic and racist communities. Because happiness often looks like privilege and is also used to justify oppression, Ahmed works to interrogate and dismantle the quest for happiness.

We strive to contribute to her effort in our examination of Silvera’s novel. *More Happy than Not* tells the story of Aaron Soto, a Puerto Rican teenager living in a working-poor community in the Bronx. While his girlfriend Genevieve, who is Dominican, is away at art camp, Aaron develops a friendship with Thomas, who helps Aaron recover from his father’s recent suicide and his own suicide attempt. As their friendship develops, Aaron realizes that he is romantically and sexually attracted to Thomas. When Thomas does not reciprocate this attraction, Aaron becomes interested in a recently developed, memory-altering, surgical procedure called Leteo. As Aaron starts to research the possibility of the procedure erasing his same-sex desires, his friends suspect his sexuality and beat him up. This act of violence “unravels” Aaron’s memories, and he learns that he has undergone the procedure before, propelling the concluding storyline in which Aaron grapples with what happiness means to him.

CONDITIONAL HAPPINESS

Ahmed (2010) argues that happiness is not just a feeling; it is actually a judgment orientation toward an object. Objects then become happy based on collective orientation toward those objects, construed broadly. Happy objects are not happiness themselves; rather, they promise happiness (i.e., If I have or do x , then happiness will follow). One example of a happy object is heterosexual love. The overarching societal message that suggests that heterosexual relationships lead to happiness further minoritizes queer people, like Aaron, for whom this happy object is unattainable. When happy objects cannot be obtained, Ahmed (2010) argues that people prioritize conditional happiness, meaning their happy object becomes the happiness of others. Take, for instance, the example of heterosexual love, which we can imagine as “ x .” Ahmed (2010) writes that a person whose happiness depends on another person may encounter this dilemma:

In cases where I [. . .] do not share your happiness with x , I might become uneasy and ambivalent, as I am made happy by your happiness but I am not made happy by what makes you happy. The exteriority of x would then announce itself as a point of crisis: I want your happiness to be what makes me happy, but I am reminded that even if my happiness is conditional on yours, your happiness is conditional on x and I am not happy with x .

(p. 57)

So, a queer person who wishes to appease a homophobic parent, for example, may want that parent’s happiness but may also recognize that the parent’s

happiness comes from the queer young person being in a heterosexual relationship. In such cases, the queer person would have limited options:

Conditional happiness would require that I take up what makes you happy *as* what makes me happy, which may involve compromising my own idea of happiness (so I will go along with x in order to make you happy even if x does not “really” make me happy). In order to preserve the happiness of all, we might even conceal from ourselves our unhappiness with x, or try to persuade ourselves that x matters less than the happiness of the other who is made happy by x.

(p. 57)

Here, the queer young person may become involved in a heterosexual relationship, even though it does not actually make the person happy. In some cases, the young person may internalize homophobia in these efforts.

Ahmed (2010) conceptualizes conditional happiness further in relation to the family: “To inherit the family can be to acquire an orientation toward some things and not others as the cause of happiness” (p. 45). Basically, people have not only their family members, who could be a source of happiness themselves, but they also have a set of values and objects that are meant to instill happiness. This is similar to conditional happiness in that the family not only presumably makes a person happy, but adhering to what makes the family happy also leads to happiness. Ahmed (2010) considers this through her theorizing of happiness scripts:

Going along with happiness scripts is how we get along; to get along is to be willing and able to express happiness in proximity to the right things. The child thus has a happiness duty. [. . .] The obligation of the child to be happy is a repaying of what the child owes, of what is due to the parents given what they have given up. The duty of the child is to make the parents happy and to perform this duty happily by being happy or by showing signs of being happy in the right way.

(p. 59)

When conditional happiness is applied to family dynamics, young people ascribe to x because they feel it is their obligation. For example, queer young people get involved in a heterosexual relationship not just because they want their parents to be happy, but because they think they *owe* it to their parents. Their parents’ happiness supercedes their own.

Application to the Novel: The Neighborhood Family

More Happy than Not illustrates how conditional happiness, especially in relation to the family, can affect the lives of queer youth of color. First, it is important to recognize that Aaron’s understanding of family is both traditional and non-traditional. His mother, father, and brother are his biological family, but his

neighborhood friends can also be seen as family and play a significant role in the book. The neighborhood friends as family is best illustrated at “Family Day,” an annual community celebration where everyone wears the same shirts. Aaron and Brendan, one of his closest friends, did not order shirts because of the cost, but a mother in the community gives them shirts anyway: “Your [neighborhood] family has taken care of you, boys. Have fun today and let any of us know if you need anything” (p. 27). They put on the shirts, and Aaron notes that they are “sort of lame” (p. 27). Yet he thinks, “But I do kind of, sort of, definitely like the sense of unity they bring. They really make this four-building complex feel less like a shitty place where we happen to live and more like a home” (p. 27). This scene takes place in a section of the book entitled, “Happiness,” underscoring the fact that Aaron associates happiness with his neighborhood family.

Throughout the novel, Aaron ascribes to happiness scripts in order to make his neighborhood family happy, even at the cost of his own happiness. This is most evident in the ways he conceals being gay in his homophobic family, both biological and neighborhood. Readers come to understand the context as homophobic in a variety of ways. For example, Aaron’s dad reprimands him when he talks about or strays from masculine gender roles. Homophobic slurs and stories about heterosexual “conquests” also permeate conversations with his friends. As a result, Aaron develops a romantic relationship with Genevieve, thinking, “It all felt so right in that moment I agreed to date her. I was the straightest guy I knew, but when I got home that night, I was still thinking about other guys” (Silvera, 2015, p. 177). At this point, his relationship is less about making Genevieve happy and more about making sure his family is happy. Eventually, Aaron can no longer compromise his own idea of happiness, and he comes out to his parents. His mother is accepting, but his father is not. Soon afterward, Aaron discovers his father has killed himself. He takes up conditional happiness again, and this time, the stakes for him are higher.

So, the happiness of those around him once again *becomes* Aaron’s happiness, and Aaron believes that the people around him will only be happy if he is straight, or at least enacts heterosexual love. He cannot do anything to make his father happy anymore, but he feels that his sexuality is to blame for his father’s death: “I know dad killed himself because of me” (Silvera, 2015, p. 196). Aaron believes that he deviated so far from his family’s “script” that he caused the ultimate action of unhappiness: his father’s suicide. By erasing the memories of his gay feelings and actions, Aaron believes he can “become” heterosexual and prevent future unhappiness. Before he undergoes the Leteo procedure, Aaron thinks, “We’re going to kill that part of me that’s ruined everything. I’m going to be straight, just like how my father would’ve wanted” (p. 205). Doing this to achieve conditional happiness, as opposed to his own happiness, is further affirmed when his doctor asks him if he would still want the procedure if his sexuality were not an issue. Aaron responds, “It’s not a matter of what I want. I need to do this” (p. 206). By going through with the procedure, Aaron literally tries to conceal himself from his unhappiness with heterosexual love for the supposed benefit of those around him.

Aaron has tried to make his neighborhood family, including Genevieve, happy by enacting heterosexuality, but he still cannot do it. When he is rejected by Thomas, Aaron feels like he has taken a risk that has ruined his chance at making his family happy: “I had a girlfriend who loved me and good friends. Now I don’t” (p. 163). He once again attempts to get the Leteo procedure, without memory that he has been through this before, telling his “old babysitter” (who is really his Leteo doctor) that “it’s not only what I want [. . .] [I]t’s what everyone wants” (p. 166). He is told to wait to make his decision, and he goes back to his neighborhood where he runs into Thomas. They discuss Thomas’s unreciprocated feelings for Aaron, and Aaron “hug[s] him and hold[s] on to him, even though he’s not [. . .] hugging back” (p. 168). His friends see and attack him, saying things like “fight back, faggot,” “why you playing with other dudes? You had a bomb-ass girlfriend,” and “it’s for your own good” (p. 169). In a violent scene, Aaron’s friends attack him. By not adhering to the happiness script of heterosexual love, he is expelled from the neighborhood family.

Pedagogy: Analysis, Journaling, and Discussion

Ahmed’s notion of conditional happiness is best understood after reading the novel rather than throughout the reading. Therefore, we recommend laying the groundwork with reading, discussing, and journaling as students read so that they are prepared for the culminating project, where they will explore her ideas in depth. Before reading the novel, we suggest that teachers introduce Ahmed’s conceptualization of happiness as a social construct with a specific focus on conditional happiness as it relates to family. Students can journal about happiness in their own communities and families, exploring such questions as: What is supposed to bring happiness? Do these things actually bring happiness in your experience? The teacher might then lead students in a discussion about heterosexual love and family as happiness objects, and students can use anecdotes or tangible evidence to illustrate how this is or is not true in their own lives. As students read, the teacher can stop periodically, particularly in the scenes closely analyzed above, to make connections between the text and conditional happiness. We recommend that teachers read Part 0: “Unhappiness” with students because of its intensity and sensitive subject matter, particularly suicide. After reading the book, teachers can use the jigsaw strategy to assign key scenes² for different groups to revisit and reanalyze through Ahmed’s lens once they recognize all that Aaron has been through.

PROXIMITY TO UNHAPPINESS

Students and teachers can problematize happiness in this unit by thinking about the harms that happiness can do, as well as the benefits of embracing unhappiness, particularly in regards to those for whom happiness, as it is socially constructed, is prohibited. Ahmed (2010) describes such a person as

“the wretch,” or, “one who is ‘sunk in deep distress, sorrow, misfortune, or poverty’” (p. 17). We can think of Aaron as the wretch, distressed by family trauma and guilt he assumes for his father’s suicide, and burdened by the homophobia he encounters. By listening to the perspective of the wretched, Ahmed considers that the “sorrow of the stranger might give us a different angle on happiness not because it teaches us what it must like to be a stranger, but because it might estrange us from the very happiness of the familiar” (p. 17). Challenging ourselves to be close to unhappiness provides opportunities to dismantle oppressive norms. Happy objects tend to align with the privileged, and people who are marginalized can find strength in rejecting those norms, even if it results in constructed unhappiness. It is important to note that LGBTQ people, for example, are not unhappy because of their sexual or gender identity but because of the homophobia and transphobia they experience. By embracing this “unhappiness,” queer youth can find solidarity and acceptance among one another.

Application to the Novel: Close to Homophobia

Through Thomas and Genevieve, we can see how a willingness to be close to unhappiness undoes oppressive ideologies, particularly homophobia. Thomas, Genevieve, Aaron’s mother, and Aaron’s brother are the only people who know Aaron is gay, and they are accepting of his sexuality to different extents. After Aaron is beaten by his neighborhood family, he is hospitalized. When he awakes, his mom tells him that Genevieve and Thomas have been by to visit him every day. In doing so, they place themselves near Aaron, the wretch, while he suffers as the object of homophobic abuse. In addition to their physical proximity, they position themselves near him emotionally, both crying with him. This intimacy is best demonstrated when Thomas visits Aaron and Aaron thinks, “It shocks me when [Thomas] starts straight-up sobbing, but it’s even more shocking when he holds my hand. [. . .] He loves me without being in love with me, and that’s all I can ask of him” (p. 286). He has a nonsexual, intimate moment with Genevieve, too, after he leaves the hospital and visits her at her house. At this point, he knows that he is losing his memory, and he says goodbye to her, kissing her and feeling “genuine and happy” (p. 282). Thus, Thomas and Genevieve are not only close to Aaron’s pain, they feel his pain with him, as well. With them, Aaron feels love.

The importance of Thomas and Genevieve mindfully placing themselves near Aaron’s unhappiness is underscored by Brendan’s visit with Aaron in the hospital, where Brendan refuses to be close to Aaron. Rather, his homophobia pervades. He says, “I don’t hate you. [. . .] I just don’t understand why you’re being gay” (Silvera, 2015, p. 275). He promises, “[Y]our boys will take care of you, A,” trying to reestablish the neighborhood family, and Aaron asks, “Even if I’m gay?” (p. 275). Brendan’s lack of response affirms that he is unwilling to be close to Aaron’s sexuality as a place of unhappiness, embracing his homophobia instead.

their findings. Ultimately, students host a gallery walk of their images. Guests, such as other students and families, can be invited to a public sharing in which they also use stickers to place themselves on the nested circles. Afterward, guests can watch the student-created videos about the possibilities of proximity to unhappiness and what students have learned from reading *More Happy than Not*.

CONCLUSION

By interrogating happiness in this book, students themselves are positioned near Aaron's unhappiness. This may motivate them to participate in social justice work that upends actual homophobia and other societal barriers to happiness for marginalized queer youth. While we suggest *More Happy than Not*, other books can also work for the purposes of this unit (see "See Also" below). Through an interrogation of happiness and the culminating project, students can take an activist approach, raising awareness of problems that the promise of happiness poses, especially for LGBTQ working-poor youth of color. Ultimately, rather than complacency with the notion of "it gets better," an understanding of what prevents the "better" and a willingness to sit with that discomfort will help students interrogate why happiness is structurally unattainable for some and imagine possibilities for dismantling the systems that make that so.

SEE ALSO

Brezenoff, S. (2014). *Brooklyn burning*. Minneapolis, MN: Carolrhoda Books. Kid is a gender-expansive queer youth who has left home and searches for their chosen family as they negotiate a home in Brooklyn. The concept of proximity to unhappiness can be explored as Kid first tries to build a family and home with Felix, a young addict; then with Fish, a lesbian bar owner; and ultimately with Scout, another gender-expansive queer youth who is also searching for family and home in Brooklyn. Kid comes to find solidarity and acceptance through proximity to unhappiness with Fish and Scout and even their family of origin.

Farizan, S. (2013). *If you could be mine*. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Young Readers.

This lesbian love story is set in contemporary Tehran, where the lovers must decide whether to follow the path expected of them or be true to their passions and desires. The concept of conditional happiness can be explored through Nasrin's choice to marry the man her affluent parents have selected for her and start a family with him, which stands in stark contrast to working-class Sahar, who decides instead to acknowledge her attractions and pursue her education. Nasrin embodies conditional happiness, whereas Sahar interrogates such a notion.

Gephart, D. (2018). *Lily and Dunkin*. New York, NY: Random House.

Lily, a white girl, and Dunkin, a white boy who recently moved to her school in Florida, navigate their budding friendship through challenges, such as bullying, Lily's coming out as transgender, and Dunkin's bipolar disorder. The concept of conditional happiness can be explored through Lily's relationship with her father and Dunkin's attempts at popularity through the basketball team. Both attempt to make others happy while accepting their own unhappiness, but they eventually learn to live true to themselves with the help of one another and other loved ones.

Rivera, G. (2016). *Juliet takes a breath*. New York, NY: Riverdale Avenue Books.

Juliet, a lesbian, Puerto Rican college student from the Bronx, travels to Portland, Oregon, for a summer internship with a feminist author. The concept of proximity to unhappiness can be explored as Juliet tries to find support in Portland but realizes that while well-intentioned, her white peers do not truly understand her experience. In contrast, she finds support through a group of queer people of color when she ends up briefly leaving Portland to visit her cousin in Miami.

NOTES

1. Throughout, we use the acronym LGBTQ to represent people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer. While we recognize this term is not all-inclusive, we are using it for purposes of clarity and brevity given its typical cultural recognition.
2. Key scenes we recommend include: Part 1: Chapter 4, "Manhunt on Family Day"; Chapter 6, "Her Happy Birthday"; Chapter 8, "No Homo"; Part 2: Chapter 1, "His Happy Birthday"; Chapter 3, "Side A"; and Chapter 6, "Side B."

REFERENCES

- Ahmed, S. (2010). *The promise of happiness*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Blackburn, B. (2018). Figures 8.1–8.3.
- Blackburn, M. V., & Schey, R. (2017). Adolescent literacies beyond heterosexual hegemony. In K. A. Hinchman & D. A. Appleman (Eds.), *Adolescent literacies: A handbook of practiced-based research* (pp. 38–60). New York, NY: Guilford Publications, Inc.
- Clark, C. T., & Blackburn, M. V. (2009). Reading LGBT-themed literature with young people in classrooms: What's possible? *English Journal*, 98(4), 25–32.
- It Gets Better Project. (2017). *About our global movement*. It Gets Better Project. Retrieved from <https://itgetsbetter.org/about/>.
- Kosciw, J. G., Greytak, E. A., Giga, N. M., Villenas, C., & Danischewski, D. J. (2015). *The 2015 national school climate survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth in our nation's schools*. Retrieved from www.glsen.org/article/2015-national-school-climate-survey.
- National Alliance on Mental Illness. (2017). *LGBTQ NAMI*. Retrieved from www.nami.org/Find-Support/LGBTQ
- Silvera, A. (2015). *More happy than not*. New York, NY: Soho Teen.

Queer Reading Practices and Ideologies

Questioning and (Not) Knowing with *Brooklyn, Burning*

Ryan Schey

For English language arts teachers advocating for sexual and gender diversity in schools, one avenue for activism is literature curricula. This work is not only about choosing *what* literary texts to read but *how* to read and interpret them, especially in ways that challenge, rather than reproduce, heteronormativity and cisnormativity. In this chapter, I focus on valuing and teaching ways of reading and knowing that help students notice, question, disrupt, and even transform phobias and normativities around sexuality and gender. I first outline frameworks for queer reading practices, discussing queer theories and reviewing their applications in education, primarily with respect to literacy and young adult literature. Next, I explore one young adult novel, Brezenoff's (2011) *Brooklyn, Burning*, considering ways to apply queer theories by attending to gender, knowledge, and intersectionality.

FRAMEWORKS FOR QUEERLY READING YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

Queer Theories

While queer theories are expansive and not monolithic, they share some important characteristics, especially in contrast with LGBT studies. Within LGBT studies, sexual and gender identities are characterized as stable identities essential to a person's core self (Lovaas, Elia, & Yep, 2006). For instance, a cis gay man might be characterized as always having been gay, and he gradually comes to know and outwardly express this internal identity through a process of coming out.

In contrast, queer theorists question and destabilize this perspective, arguing that sexuality and gender are social, multiple, and variable (Jagose, 1996; Sedgwick, 1993). They argue for the possibility of people moving fluidly among identity categories and even suspending one's identification with these

categories. This complements queer theorists' interest in interrogating how normative identity categories are continually (re)produced, naturalized, and rendered invisible. Since these norms are frequently taken for granted and seen as "common sense," the process of naming and questioning them can feel disruptive, because it is. It results in rupturing what people think they know, what they expect to know, and how they go about knowing it, hence the queer theory argument that all knowledge is intertwined with sexuality and gender.

While queer theorists have been impactful, scholars (e.g., Cohen, 1997; Ferguson, 2004; Muñoz, 1999) have critiqued the implicit whiteness in some of this work, arguing for greater attention to how sexuality and gender are always intertwined with race, class, and other identity markers. While queer theorists have generally critiqued norms that naturalize and privilege heterosexual and cisgender identities (what are referred to as heteronormativity and cishnormativity), queer of color theorists extend this work by highlighting that these normativities are also racialized. Moreover, they challenge norms that privilege particular expressions of queerness, such as white, middle class, monogamy grounded in respectability politics (what is referred to as homonormativity).

Within and beyond academia, people use the term *queer* differently, for instance, using *queer* as an umbrella term to reference people who are neither straight nor cisgender. In this chapter, I deploy it (and variations such as *queering*) to highlight notions of fluidity, suspension, and disruption with attention to noncisheteronormative sexualities and genders.

Queer Studies in Education: Literacy and Literature

Educational scholars (e.g., Blackburn & McCreedy, 2009; Britzman, 1995; Brockenbrough, 2015) have utilized queer theories to interrogate homophobia, transphobia, and their intersections with other forms of oppression, such as racism and classism. Again, contrasting with an LGBT studies approach is helpful. In that approach, teachers might utilize an LGBT-inclusive curriculum, believing that including representations can inform straight and cis students about LGBT people, bringing about individual attitudinal change and empathy.

Educational approaches grounded in queer theories are not about representations of LGBT people per se, or straight and cis people for that matter. Instead, queer perspectives focus on ways of reading, interpreting, and knowing that naturalize and privilege some identities and categories, while positioning others as unnatural, aberrant, marginal, and hypervisible. Some literacy scholars have described using this approach (e.g., Blackburn, 2003; Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018; Schey, 2017; Smith, 2008). Their shared goal is to support students in learning interpretive practices for reading literature where they notice and question the textual, and by extension sociocultural, processes through which identities are produced, sustained, and normalized, or not. By learning to read the word in this way, they might in turn reread the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

Blackburn, Clark, and Nemeth (2015), rather than focusing on queer literacy, define queer literature. They explain that queer texts offer representations of sexual and gender identities that are multiple, fluid, conflicting, and even suspended, although it is rare for texts to entirely eschew identity labels for significant characters. Queer literature disrupts normative conceptions of sexuality, gender, family, home, and potentially others, such as time.

Many texts, especially LGBT-themed literature, offer queer elements to varying degrees. Similarly, any text could be read through a queer perspective, although some more readily lend themselves to it than others, particularly for readers unfamiliar with this perspective. Utilizing literature foregrounding queer ideologies to such a degree that it is queer-themed is particularly fruitful for learning purposes. By explicitly centering queerness, these novels provide novice readers with clear, if not unavoidable, ruptures to interpret. After this learning, readers might apply these practices to other texts. I now turn to one such novel, providing an overview and then discussing three potential ways to draw upon queer theories in literature instruction.

QUEERING READING PRACTICES WITH *BROOKLYN, BURNING*

Novel Overview

Brezenoff's *Brooklyn, Burning* is set in the borough of Brooklyn, New York, primarily in the Polish neighborhood of Greenpoint during the early 2000s. The novel follows the experiences of two protagonists, Kid and Scout, both of whom are teenagers and musicians navigating life on the streets as they fall in love and perform their first gig. They find support through a network of friends and chosen family, such as a local bar owner named Fish. However, a fire that burned down an abandoned factory where Kid was squatting has resulted in a police investigation, and Kid is a prime suspect. Through this, social services eventually discovers that Kid is dealing with grief due to the loss of a previous love, Felix, to a drug overdose. Kid is eventually exonerated and returns home.

A unique feature of the text is its narrative technique. Kid is referenced through singular, first-person pronouns (I/me/mine), while Scout is referenced in the second person (you/your/yours). Neither is referenced through the use of third-person, singular pronouns (she/her/hers or he/him/his). As a result, the gender and, therefore sexual, identities of Kid and Scout are unknown, an eschewal of identity labels that queer theorists would describe as a suspension of these categories. This effect is enhanced through the multiple, potentially bi or pansexual, attractions of other characters. For instance, Kid attempts to initiate physical intimacy with a young woman Konny who has relationships with young women and men. So, using these relationships cannot definitively gender Kid or Scout. Even if, as the audiobook version suggests due to the voice actors, Kid is more masculine and Scout feminine,

Kid still expresses attraction to both women/girls (Konny and Scout-read-as-woman) and men/boys (Felix), suggesting a bisexual identity. However, imposing labels on characters who so explicitly refuse them seems problematic.

Brooklyn, Burning is unique because the identities of the protagonists, rather than a minor or even significant character, are suspended, a rarity in literature. Moreover, these embodied identities are central rather than peripheral to the plot: the father names Kid's inability to name a gender or sexual identity as a rationale for kicking Kid out of the family apartment. The novel offers a representation of queer community, where Kid and Scout create a network of support, even a chosen family, among youth and adults similar to them rather than being isolated. For instance, Kid suggests that Fish, the bar owner, shows sympathy rather than anger or frustration with Kid's actions because when she was younger, she might have been rejected by her family for not being straight. For these reasons, I find the text compelling as it offers affordances for learning queer reading practices that can be subsequently applied to other texts.

Reading Approaches

Whenever I consider what certain perspectives, such as queer theories, offer for education, I find that my pedagogical imagination is always being shaped by my classroom experiences. I have difficulty articulating any ideas for teaching and learning without thinking about them in relation to the people in a particular class. In this chapter, the ideas are intimately shaped by a semester I spent co-teaching and co-researching an LGBTQ-themed literature course with Mollie Blackburn and high school juniors and seniors, a project where Mollie took the lead in teaching (Blackburn & Schey, 2018; Schey & Blackburn, under review). While the voices of students are not directly quoted, I have been inspired by how discussions of *Brooklyn, Burning* unfolded in that classroom. Thus, I understand this chapter as polyphonic, imbued with multiple voices in ways I hope resonate with the multiplicity and variability central to queer theories. In this spirit, I present three, rather than only one, potential queering approaches for reading *Brooklyn, Burning*. The first focuses on gender, the second on knowledge, and the third on intersectionality.

Gender Identities: Queering Taken-for-Granted Reading Practices

From the novel's opening, the suspension of Kid's and Scout's gender identities is apparent. Scout has arrived in the morning outside of Fish's bar, holding a flyer Kid and Felix made to recruit band members. Beyond ambiguity via pronouns, Kid's descriptions of Scout's physical appearance are gender neutral or androgynous. For instance, Kid narrates: "I didn't notice your long hands and rough fingertips, or the dozens—is it hundreds?—of bracelets on your left wrist, made of busted guitar strings" (p. 4). If the subtlety of pronouns and descriptions are not a signal to readers, a more explicit tension arises moments

later. When Scout enquires about a name, Kid replies, “Everyone calls me Kid . . . As in ‘Billy the’” (p. 7). Scout quickly asks if Kid’s real name is Billy, and the response suggests hurt and frustration, even anger, amidst clenched teeth: “My name is really Kid . . . Okay?” (p. 7).

Since the text, in subtle and explicit ways, refuses to reveal stable and explicit gender identities for the protagonists, excerpts like this one are ripe to read closely for markers suggesting gender. In my experiences reading this novel with youth, readers pose the questions whether or not adult educators do. Even if these topics do not spontaneously arise, teachers can initiate, the goal being to have students notice and name qualities of the characters so students’ underlying, taken-for-granted assumptions around gender (or sexuality) are named and become available for the group to consider and question.

For instance, in the previous passage, Scout’s ears are described as sticking out a little, like a “pixie” (p. 3). Moments later, Scout’s hands are described as long with rough fingertips. It is not difficult to imagine a classroom conversation where some students interpret the pixie detail as suggesting Scout’s femininity and woman-ness, while others interpret the rough fingertips to suggest masculinity and man-ness, while still others challenge both of these interpretations. Such multiple and conflicting perspectives on gender lends to further inque(e)ry into the novel.

Teachers could use incredibly common literacy tools to facilitate this exploration. For instance, they could have students annotate a short excerpt, using multiple colors of pens or highlighters to mark evidence of gender identities (e.g., man, woman, nonbinary) and adding explanatory notes in the margin. A graphic organizer for two-column notes could function similarly. Regardless of the particular tool a teacher uses, the goal is to have students identify textual evidence and then articulate their reasons for interpreting evidence in a particular way with respect to gender. On the one hand, students can debate the nuances of specific textual moments. The claims and refutations enable students to name, question, and interrogate some of their own assumptions about gender that are bound up in their reading practices. On the other hand, the class could compile all of the rationales, looking for patterns and contradictions in how classroom members understand gender.

This approach shifts away from focusing on the individual characters and whether they adequately embody and publicly display normative woman-man binary identities. Instead, it facilitates students naming, examining, and potentially interrogating the taken-for-granted signifiers of gender they rely on to construct and maintain normative identity categories. This facilitates an exploration of the cultural ideologies of gender, which exemplifies a queered reading practice.

Concealing and Revealing: Exploring (Not) Knowing

While readers undoubtedly experience not knowing in relation to Kid’s and Scout’s gender (and sexual) identities, the narrative features broader themes of knowing and not knowing. By focusing on the dynamics of characters

concealing and revealing information, students and teachers can move away from queered reading practices focusing on gender and sexuality in isolation to consider their relationships to other norms, as suggested by Blackburn et al. (2015), as they discuss disrupting family, home, and time norms.

Students and teachers could explore which characters reveal what information, to whom, and why, considering how concealing and revealing impacts the quality of their relationships and lives. For example, around the novel's midpoint, Kid has been arrested and is discussing the warehouse fire with the social worker, Ms. Weinstein. Up to this point, Kid has variously claimed guilt and innocence for the fire and at other times simply refused to take any stance. However, Ms. Weinstein reveals herself to be trustworthy, and Kid chooses to disclose innocence. Moments later, an officer mentions to Ms. Weinstein Kid's relationship with Felix and his death the past year due to an overdose. As Kid continues to reflect on this situation across the novel, it becomes clear that Kid felt guilty for Felix's death and thought that taking blame for the fire might offer some atonement.

With this situation, students and teachers might explore why Kid makes these decisions to conceal and only later reveal information about the fire. In my reading, Kid's choices are not about subterfuge or manipulation. Instead, they are about Kid working through pain, grief, and confusion amidst struggling to survive on the street due to transphobic and homophobic family ostracism. While Kid does conceal information, it is part of a process of making sense of trauma. It is also about protection, choosing to conceal as a way to mitigate vulnerability. While this should not be treated as a simplistic analogy for Kid's gender, it still can offer readers a way to consider the complexities of (not) knowing. Where focusing on close reading for gender markers can help make taken-for-granted assumptions of gender available for examination, this second reading approach around (not) knowing complements it by offering ways for readers to explore the complexities and multiplicity around knowledge practices more broadly. Examining Kid's concealing and revealing around the warehouse fire might be read with and against other moments of (not) knowing: Kid's father's choice to conceal from the mother that he kicked out Kid; Kid's father's angry reactions to not knowing Kid's gender and sexual identities; or Scout's disappearance and return at the novel's conclusion.

Intersectionality: Paying Attention to Interrelations

Attention to gender, sexuality, and (not) knowing can be complemented by focusing on intersectionality and interpreting how different identity markers become significant for characters. While social class and economics are consistently, even if subtly, in the background of the novel, race and ethnicity are less apparent. So, reading through this lens can entail looking for what is said along with the silences.

One approach could involve students and teachers examining the interrelations between gender, sexuality, and social class. For instance, Kid's gender

and economic vulnerabilities seem to compound one another. While there is no singular reason why Kid is kicked out of the family apartment, gender expression plays a role, as the dad explicitly states on multiple occasions. Once on the street with few economic resources, Kid becomes more vulnerable to harm, whether physical (such as being attacked by a man living in an abandoned factory) or psychological (such as being unable to access support when processing Felix's death). Even when Kid does try to reach out to and call the dad and mom after being arrested, this is an impossibility because, as working-class people, they are working late and taking extra shifts.

In addition, there is the ongoing background of gentrification in Brooklyn, where families such as Kid's experience increased insecurity by the ongoing real estate changes in the city. By noticing, naming, and asking questions about how social class and economics impact the characters' experiences in relation to gender and sexuality, readers can construct greater nuance in reading. This helps move queering reading practices beyond being a stand-alone or isolated way of reading only about LGBT identities. Instead, it becomes about how people—whether around gender, sexuality, knowledge circulation, or economics—produce and maintain normativity, whether normative binary genders, expectations of total revelation, neoliberal capitalist development, or the interrelations among these.

However, reading through a queer lens around the apparent class dynamics needs to be paired with reading for absences and silences, such as around racial and ethnic identities. While a few characters are named as Polish or Dominican and it is strongly suggested that Kid is Polish, there is otherwise silence regarding race and ethnicity, a silence that should not be equated with the suspension of gender, which is an explicit topic in the novel. Having worked with noticing, naming, and questioning other facets of identity in the novel, discussions around race become a valuable opportunity for students and teachers to extend and complicate their previous thinking. For instance, they might attempt to engage in close reading to interpret characters' racial or ethnic identities, similar to how they did with gender. Alternatively, they might consider why or how there is a silence around these identities in the novel, what impact this has, and who benefits from and is hurt by such silences.

CONCLUSION

In closing, it is important to emphasize that these three approaches are not *the* ways to move into queer reading and pedagogy. They are meant to provide illustrative sketches to help spark your teacherly imagination. Reading queerly is less about any one concrete approach in the classroom and more about cultivating an ongoing stance with students in relation to their reading. Such a stance is not a singular event but, ideally, becomes an expected everyday part of interpreting literature, such that students can notice, name, and question who and what gets to count as “normal” in and through any text.

SEE ALSO

Levithan, D. (2012). *Every day*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.

Each morning, A wakes up in a different body, living that person's life for one day until the next. The variability introduced through A's experiences foregrounds queer ideologies with respect to fluidity and certainty, making it a productive text for queer readings. Teachers should use caution, though, since the supernatural explanation for A's embodiment subtly positions queer people as beyond humanity. Furthermore, A is the only such being in existence, so A experiences isolation rather than queer community. Offering or excerpting this text alongside others could help ameliorate these tensions.

Garvin, J. (2016). *Symptoms of being human*. New York, NY: Balzer + Bray.

Riley is a high schooler navigating a new school, the pressure of a congressman father running for reelection, and the risks of coming out as gender fluid. The novel foregrounds fluidity through the protagonist, complementing queer reading practices. However, a sense of not knowing is not necessarily present as with Brezenoff's or Levithan's novels. Again, excerpting this text alongside others would offer a range of queer literary texts for comparison and analysis.

Slater, D. (2017). *The 57 bus*. New York, NY: Farrar Straus Giroux.

This nonfiction book explores a national news story of a hate crime involving two youth, one identifying as agender. Like Garvin's novel, Slater's book foregrounds a person who rejects stable binary genders. Furthermore, it offers a complex story that asks readers to grapple with questions of race, class, gender, identity, morality, the criminal justice system, and forgiveness, helping readers explore intersectionality in a way that Brezenoff's novel does not. However, since the book represents a noncisgender person being a victim of violence, teachers should use caution to not offer this as the only representation of gender diversity, pairing it instead with other texts.

Morrison, T. (1996). Recitatif. In M. Golden & S. R. Shreve (Eds.), *Skin deep: Black women and white women write about race* (pp. 87–110). New York, NY: Anchor.

Morrison's short story recounts a series of encounters between two women—one black, one white, although readers are not told who is which. Similar to Brezenoff's novel, this text features an author intentionally not revealing information about characters' identities in a way that impacts the plot, provoking readers to examine their assumptions. Pairing it with *Brooklyn, Burning* could productively extend a queer reading practice, while pushing readers to think more about the intersections of racial and gender identities. Teachers should use care to emphasize the interrelations between these identity categories rather than positioning them as unrelated, separate, or analogous categories.

Fessenden, M. (2015). Gender neutral clothes are trendy, but not new—Humans dressed similarly for centuries. *Smithsonian.com*. Retrieved from www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/gender-neutral-clothes-arent-new-humans-dressed-similarly-centuries-180955109.

AND

Maglaty, J. (2011). When did girls start wearing pink? *Smithsonian.com*. Retrieved from www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/when-did-girls-start-wearing-pink-1370097.

These two multimodal nonfiction articles combine prose and images to explore how clothing as a gender marker has changed across history and geography. Since these articles present factual historical information about gender practices, they invite readers to notice and rethink taken-for-granted assumptions about gender and clothing. They also help readers see cross-cultural diversity, moving beyond the US. These articles could usefully be read alongside some of the other suggestions, especially to help students think more complexly about gender diversity and intersectionality.

REFERENCES

- Blackburn, M. V. (2003). Exploring literacy performances and power dynamics at The Loft: Queer youth reading the world and the word. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 37, 467–490.
- Blackburn, M. V., Clark, C. T., & Nemeth, E. A. (2015). Examining queer elements and ideologies in LGBT-themed literature: What queer literature can offer young adult readers. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 47(1), 11–48.
- Blackburn, M. V., & McCready, L. T. (2009). Voices of queer youth in urban schools: Possibilities and limitations. *Theory Into Practice*, 48, 222–230.
- Blackburn, M. V., & Schey, R. (2018). Shared vulnerability, collaborative composition, and the interrogation and reification of oppressive values in a high school LGBTQ-themed literature course. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 50(3), 335–358.
- Brezenoff, S. (2011). *Brooklyn, burning*. Minneapolis, MN: Carolrhoda Lab.
- Britzman, D. P. (1995). Is there a queer pedagogy?: Or, stop thinking straight. *Educational Theory*, 45(2), 151–165.
- Brockenbrough, E. (2015). Queer of color agency in educational contexts: Analytic frameworks from a queer of color critique. *Educational Studies: A Journal of the American Educational Studies Association*, 51(1), 28–44.
- Cohen, C. J. (1997). Punks, bulldaggers, and welfare queens: The radical potential of queer politics? *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 3, 437–465.
- Ferguson, R. A. (2004). *Aberrations in black: Toward a queer of color critique*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Freire, P., & Macedo, D. (1987). *Literacy: Reading the word and the world*. South Hadley, MA: Bergin and Garvey Publishers.
- Jagose, A. (1996). *Queer theory: An introduction*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Lovaas, K. E., Elia, J. P., & Yep, G. A. (2006). Shifting ground(s): Surveying the contested terrain and LGBT studies and queer theory. In K. E. Lovaas, J. P. Elia, &

- G. A. Yep (Eds.), *LGBT studies and queer theory: New conflicts, collaborations, and contested terrain* (pp. 1–18). New York, NY: Harrington Park Press.
- Muñoz, J. E. (1999). *Disidentifications: Queers of color and the performance of politics*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Ryan, C. L., & Hermann-Wilmarth, J. M. (2018). *Reading the rainbow: LGBTQ-inclusive literacy instruction in the elementary classroom*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Schey, R. (2017). Towards intersectional literacy practices: Interrogating homonormativity through reading Sáenz's *Aristotle and Dante*. *The ALAN Review*, 45(1), 32–43.
- Schey, R., & Blackburn, M. V. (under review). Queer ruptures to literacy normativities: Visualizing and hypothesizing toward empathizing.
- Sedgwick, E. K. (1993). Epistemology of the closet. In H. Abelove, M. A. Barale, & D. M. Halperin (Eds.), *The lesbian and gay studies reader* (pp. 45–61). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Smith, J. M. (2008). Montana 1948: Crossing boundaries with queer theory. In A. O. Soter, M. Faust, & T. M. Rogers (Eds.), *Interpretive play: Using critical perspectives to teach young adult literature* (pp. 161–171). Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon.

Complicating the Coming Out Story

Unpacking Queer and (Anti)Normative Thinking in *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda*

Angel Daniel Matos

Wherein lies the value of a coming out story geared toward a contemporary young adult (YA) audience? Scholars have long been suspicious of these stories, due mostly to their ubiquity in queer literature and how they reinforce normative approaches to sexuality.¹ The assumed fatigue of this plot was highlighted by Hayn and Hazlett (2011), who suggested that sexuality should not be “the central issue or problem to be overcome” in queer YA novels (p. 69). Years after making this claim, they identified an emerging body of YA literature “where being [queer] was not the plot’s nucleus,” which they approach as “the single most positive and defining movement towards LGBTQ adolescent works” (p. 70). Cart and Jenkins (2006) have similarly argued that queer YA literature “needs to be—and is slowly becoming—more than coming-out stories,” and they celebrate contemporary texts for portraying the “increasing opportunities for assimilation that occur after the dramatic moment of coming out” (pp. 165–166). These scholars have made these claims in hopes for a robust body of queer YA literature that tackles multiple aspects of adolescent queerness, which indeed is a necessary development. This discussion, however, will reconsider the centrality of the YA coming out story, especially in regard to how it addresses matters of privilege and how it enables and hinders different possibilities for existing in the world.

The coming out story has been central to the development of contemporary queer consciousness, especially when considering its penchant for underscoring issues that queer people encounter in their journeys for (self-)acceptance. Despite this importance, the narrative’s disposition to represent coming out experiences as goal-oriented and monolithic endeavors has fueled skepticism about their centrality in queer texts, in that they reinforce binary thinking and erase forms of sexuality that resist normative categorizations. Uncertainties regarding the coming out plot have become even more substantial in YA

novels, due to their characteristic conflation of coming out and coming-of-age narratives. As suggested by Thein and Kedley (2016), these novels restrict explorations of sexuality “because they insist on characters’ settling on definitive sexual identities as narrative resolution rather than allowing for the kinds of complex, nuanced, and/or unsettled sexual or gender identities that Queer Theory would suggest we all experience” (p. 7). The YA coming out plot often culminates with the protagonist solidifying a stable queer identity, leaving few opportunities for sexuality to be approached as fluid. Other scholars such as Jolly (2001) have questioned the coming out story’s potential to “answer emerging questions over sexual identity and represent the complexity of sexual experience in the postmodern and global context.” In spite of these apprehensions, Jolly acknowledges that these stories are valuable for readers because they serve as a form of “social intervention,” in that they are “crucial responses to needs for community and individualization in our varied historical contexts” (p. 491). What social interventions do contemporary YA coming out narratives mobilize? How does this interrogation highlight the need to further nuance our understanding of what this narrative accomplishes?

This discussion addresses the importance of complicating understandings of the YA coming out narrative, particularly by examining the role of fluidity and privilege in these stories. Rather than pushing for a departure away from the coming out narrative, this chapter instead advocates for the need to actively (re)consider how sociocultural factors affect the intervention carried out by the coming out narrative and how a novel’s identity frameworks may be more multifaceted than they initially seem. Albertalli’s *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* (2015, henceforth *Simon VHSA*) will be the focal text in this examination, with special attention given to how it reinforces and disputes the expectations of YA coming out stories. This novel is effective for this analysis due to its boom in popularity—thanks in part to its film adaptation, *Love, Simon* (2018)—and to its depiction of an archetypal coming out narrative that potentially bolsters the normative tendencies of queer YA literature.

NEGOTIATIONS OF SEXUALITY AND IDENTITY IN *SIMON VHSA*

Simon Spier, the protagonist of *Simon VHSA*, is a white, middle-class, closeted teen who exchanges emails with another anonymous teen who goes by the penname “Blue.” Blue covertly discloses his queerness via social media, prompting Simon, who assumes the pseudonym “Jacques,” to contact Blue via email. They correspond regularly, keeping their identities secret but discussing matters such as their family dynamics and the difficulties of coming out. The safe space provided through these messages is thwarted once Simon’s classmate, Martin, accidentally discovers them in a public computer. Simon is blackmailed into playing matchmaker between Martin and Simon’s friend, Abby, lest he risks being outed to the public. Simon’s failure at playing matchmaker rouses Martin to reveal Simon’s queerness on social media. Forced to

come out to his family and friends, Simon confronts Martin about the problematic implications of outing another person against their will. Blue eventually reveals that he is Bram—Simon’s gay, black, and Jewish classmate. He and Simon become boyfriends, and the novel concludes with a public acknowledgment of their relationship on Facebook.

Simon VHSA merges the coming-of-age and coming out plots—reinforcing the aforementioned trope in which narrative resolution is achieved once queer characters come out. This reductive perspective toward coming out experiences is supported by various events and outcomes in the text. During one of his email conversations with Blue/Bram, for instance, Simon discloses that he continued dating girls even after he realized his attraction to boys. Blue questions this dating tendency, which leads Simon to reflect on his own sexuality and how other people perceive it: “I wonder if [Blue] thinks I’m really fake. I get the impression that once he realized he was gay, he didn’t date girls, and it was as simple as that” (p. 22). Simon assumes that continuing to date girls thwarts his queerness. He also reinforces an unsustainable distinction between “real” and “inauthentic” forms of queerness that forecloses the possibility of other queer practices and identities to emerge—not to mention that there are serious implications of bisexual erasure in this statement. Simon’s practice of continuing to date girls after self-acknowledging his queerness is cast as an issue because it breaches the YA narrative trend of characters settling on definitive, permanent forms of sexual identity post-coming out.

Various events in the novel, both overt and subtle, uphold the tyranny of a more permanent gay identity, as seen in the various moments that Simon comes out to other people. Take, for instance, the moment when he comes out to his friend Abby while driving back to his home:

We’re stopped at a red, and I’m waiting to turn left, and all I can hear is the frantic clicking of my turn signal.

[. . .]

“You can’t tell anyone,” I say. “No one else knows this.”

She doesn’t speak, but I perceive her angling her body toward me. Her knees are folded up onto the passenger seat. She waits.

I didn’t plan to do this tonight.

“So. The thing is, I’m gay.”

It’s the first time I’ve said those words out loud. I pause with my hands on the steering wheel, waiting to feel something extraordinary.

The light turns green.

(Albertalli, 2015, pp. 123–124)

The understated ways in which this interaction evokes notions of space and mobility shed light on its framing of the coming out process. Prior to Simon’s revelation, the traffic light turns red—forcing the vehicle to come to a full stop. Closetedness is framed through notions of stasis and immobility. As the car is stalled, Simon still inhabits a realm of ambiguity where his sexual

identity is not exactly concretized or stabilized. After Simon verbally utters the words “I’m gay” for the first time, the traffic light turns green, granting the car clearance to continue its trajectory.

Here, it is worth thinking through the ties between space, mobility, and sexuality. In her phenomenological approach toward sexual orientation, Ahmed (2006) suggests that a normatively “good” life

must return the debt of its life by taking on the direction promised as social good, which means imagining one’s futurity in terms of reaching certain points along a life course. Such points accumulate, creating the impression of a straight line. To follow such a line might be a way to become straight, by not deviating at any point.

(p. 554)

Although queerness is often represented as a point of deviation from “the good life,” this may not be the case in terms of how *Simon VHSA* frames the disclosure of sexual orientation. The aforementioned coming out scene presents this confession not as a form of deviation, but rather, another point in a path toward a normative, “good” life—a path that becomes clear and well-defined once the green light activates after Simon’s revelation. By associating the act of coming out with the onward mobility granted by the green traffic light, the novel prioritizes concrete forms of sexuality that can be defined and labeled—casting aside the indefinability central in most Queer frameworks. The novel’s stance toward sexuality becomes discernible when Simon describes the “permanency” of coming out: “A part of me feels like I jumped over some kind of border, and now I’m on the other side realizing I can’t cross back” (p. 128). Echoing Thein and Kedley’s arguments, this is a quintessential moment in which a queer YA novel represents sexuality as immutable after the moment of coming out.

Although the novel’s narrative supports the notion of coming out as monolithic, it nonetheless has a more complex framework regarding identity formation. *Simon VHSA* approaches identity, particularly queerness, as fixed and permanent—in that identities create rigid boundaries that supposedly cannot be crossed back and forth. However, the novel is exceedingly invested in the notion of identity as fluid, as seen in moments where Simon challenges the narratives that other characters impose on him. Simon, for instance, agonizes over instances when others remark about how he has changed. When his mother notes how Simon now drinks coffee, for example, he highlights that there’s a mismatch between his practices and his parents’ expectations: “They put me in a box, and every time I try to nudge the lid open, they slam it back down. It’s like nothing about me is allowed to change” (p. 162). Simon explicitly links the notion of change to coming out, which offers more insight into the complexities of the novel’s frameworks:

We’re not religious. My parents are Democrats. My dad likes to joke around, and it would definitely be awkward, but I guess I’m lucky. I know

they're not going to disown me. [...] But I'm tired of coming out. All I ever do is come out. I try not to change, but I keep changing, in all these tiny ways. I get a girlfriend. I have a beer. And every freaking time, I have to reintroduce myself to the universe all over again.

(pp. 55–56)

While in this instance identity is depicted as malleable, the novel nonetheless frames sexual identity as rigid. The ending of the novel acutely reinforces this perspective, in that most of the novel's major tensions, including its central romance, are resolved *after* the queer characters come out. As seen in the passage above, however, the novel approaches identity formation as an ongoing struggle that demands constant reinterpretation and rethinking. Even though the novel achieves narrative resolution by representing positive coming out experiences, its awareness of identity as an ongoing, perpetually resurfacing negotiation suggests that Simon and Bram will continue to reconcile the boundaries of the closet well beyond the temporal scope represented in the novel. What would hypothetically happen when Simon encounters another “red light” while traversing through the path of life? Will he stall? Will he move forward? Will he take a U-turn? Or will he deviate from this path into a road less traveled?

Moreover, one must consider the elements that allow Simon's points of deviation to be reframed as another moment in a linear, normative narrative. When Simon expresses exhaustion as he negotiates the boundaries of the closet, he does not expect to encounter backlash from his family mostly because his parents are liberal. The novel also stresses how Simon constantly experiences the material comforts provided by an open-minded, middle-class upbringing. In this moment, Simon *explicitly* acknowledges his privilege, and the stakes of this acknowledgment are highlighted when Blue expresses how religion intensifies the risks of coming out to one's family:

Jews and Episcopalians are supposed to be gay-friendly, but it's hard to really know how that applies to your own parents. Like, you read about these gay kids with really churchy Catholic parents, and the parents end up doing PFLAG and Pride Parades and everything. And then you hear about parents who are totally fine with homosexuality, but can't handle it when their own kid comes out.

(pp. 106–107)

Bram, like Simon, expresses reluctance to come out to his parents. He acknowledges that his parents' religious leanings are not an assurance that they will approach his queerness with sensibility, thus highlighting the need to take intersectional forms of oppression into account when examining and critiquing representations of the coming out plot. Bram's apprehension becomes even more justifiable once he reveals his identities to Simon, thus suggesting that he potentially has experienced multilayered forms of oppression due to his

race, religion, *and* sexuality. Although the novel sidelines a rigorous examination of the ways in which race inflects queerness, the contrast between Simon's and Bram's coming out experiences provides opportunities to examine the diverse levels of subjugation that different teen characters experience.

The novel's implementation of characters that have access to different privileges and that embody different intersections of identity provides insight into its uneasy stance on normative thinking. Simon, for instance, spends most of the novel envisioning Blue as white, only to discover that reality did not mesh with the narrative he fabricated in his mind: "White shouldn't be the default any more than straight should be the default. There shouldn't even be a default" (pp. 268–269). Again, the novel advocates for ideals that are central in most Queer frameworks: It emphasizes the issues with putting people in boxes and with default/normative perspectives toward identity. These perspectives are nonetheless pressured by moments where queerness is represented as immutable. Much of these tensions can be attributed to the novel's status as YA literature, which is notorious for teaching adolescents "how to exist within the (capitalistically) bound institutions that necessarily define teenagers' existence" (Trites, 2000, p. 19). YA literature possesses a socializing tendency that pushes teenagers to fit within existing conventions and social structures—a penchant that is at odds with the radical aims of Queer thought.

Simon VHSA underpins many of the issues found in YA coming out narratives. However, there are moments in which its narrative thwarts the expectations and paranoias that one may have of this plot. While the novel may follow a relatively "straight" and linear path, it offers readers points of deviation that can lead them astray from the trappings of normative thinking. But are these points of deviation enough? In perpetuating a linear template for queer life and queer becoming, does one run the risk of, as Ahmed (2006) would put it, performing "a certain injustice to those queers whose lives are lived for different points?" (p. 570). Coming out narratives will inevitably carve out a path for ideas and experiences that cannot be neatly organized or aligned. They nonetheless offer opportunities to witness *a take* on the benefits and risks of privately and publicly acknowledging one's queerness and the various shapes and forms that these takes can assume.

PEDAGOGICAL APPLICATIONS

Simon VHSA reinforces and challenges the expectations that many scholars have of YA coming out stories, especially regarding simplistic takes on queer identity. Although it bolsters normative perspectives, *Simon VHSA* does an effective job of highlighting some of the challenges that queer teens face when negotiating the perks and perils of coming out. This novel possesses a complicated stance toward identity and coming out; however, it is but one interpretation of the pressures and complexities of queer experience. In his review of *Love, Simon*, D'Addario (2018) raises an issue that also applies to the novel: Simon's experiences may not resonate with the lives of teens who are not

white, cisgender, masculine, or middle-to-upper class. Albertalli's novel shows how even "normal" and privileged teens sometimes struggle in negotiating their sexuality and the boundaries of the closet. This novel is a starting point, a moment of deviation into a body of queer literature often sidelined in secondary curricula. But this deviation truly shines when students can contrast Simon's story with other narratives focused on varying intersections of identity. There are countless YA coming out novels that offer sociocultural interventions that contrast significantly from Simon's—by comparing his fictionalized experiences with other coming out stories, students can contemplate the forms that YA coming out narratives can assume while also developing a more sophisticated consideration of how normativity and privilege affect the development and content of these stories.

The "See Also" box at the end of this chapter includes suggestions for novels that can prompt insightful conversations about the coming out plot. These texts are but a few examples of ones that can be paired with Alberalli's novel to facilitate conversations that complicate understandings of the YA coming out story. The following questions can be helpful in generating conversations in the classroom when comparing and contrasting these texts:

1. What obstacles do queer characters face when negotiating the boundaries of the closet? Which characters experience more difficulties in their attempts to come out?
2. Do these novels represent sexuality and identity as flexible or malleable? Permanent and unyielding? Or perhaps somewhere in between?
3. How do Simon's experiences contrast with those of characters from other texts? What privileges and comforts ease Simon's coming out process? Do other queer characters have access to similar comforts and privileges?

These questions are intended to start conversations on the divergences and similarities that exist across different coming out journeys, which will push students to acknowledge the various forms that this process can assume and how the outcomes of this process are inflected by different domains of identity. Furthermore, addressing these questions in the classroom will invite students to recognize that the coming out process is not a monolithic endeavor. A critical message in *Simon VHSA* is that "There shouldn't even be a default," and this message holds particularly true in examinations of the YA coming out narrative. There is *no* default for a coming out process. We now have unprecedented access to a growing body of queer YA literature—and sexuality is not a focal concern in many of these texts. But the coming out plot, and novels in which a protagonist's sexuality is a central issue, will not disappear anytime soon, nor *should* they disappear given that sexuality is undoubtedly a central concern in the lives of so many teenagers. By claiming that queer YA literature *needs* to be more than coming out stories centered on a protagonist's sexuality, Hayn, Hazlett, Cart, and Jenkins were making a much-needed intervention

that paved the way for a more diverse body of queer YA literature. By making this claim, however, they problematically assimilate all coming out narratives. Not only do they simplify these narratives by failing to consider that closetedness is simply not a matter of being “in” or “out,” but they also sideline the role of privilege and the issues with monolithic approaches to queerness in their assessment.

Teachers need to continuously highlight the tensions and complexities found in coming out narratives. They must push readers to unceasingly question who has the *privilege* of coming out without repercussions, and whether solidified queer identities should be exalted or not in the genre. This discussion has provided some frameworks needed to engage in this ongoing process of inquiry. When teaching queer YA literature, one must think of the coming out process as a complex phenomenon that cannot be reduced to a single narrative, even when examining this process within the context of a single novel. Furthermore, one must consider the importance of intersectional thinking when making claims about how YA narratives need to develop and evolve. We need to continue complicating what the coming out process entails, what tensions are identified in its narrativization, and how it continues to represent the lives of teenagers from different walks of life. While it is necessary for teens to have access to narratives in which sexuality is not a major issue, let us not perpetuate (either deliberately or incidentally) the normative myth that coming out stories are worn-out, outmoded, or peripheral.

SEE ALSO

Daniels, A. (2017). *Dreadnought*. New York, NY: Diversion Books.

The powers of a fallen superhero transfer to a transgender teen, which accordingly alter her body to better suit her aspirations and desires. Using conventions of the superhero plot to mobilize a transgender narrative, *Dreadnought* highlights ideologies of gender and the body that frequently affect the lives of transgender teens. It exploits tropes in the fantasy and superhero genres to mobilize discourse on notions such as “secret identities,” the problematic conflation of gender and sexuality, and matters of privilege raised when transgender people can pass as cisgender.

Silvera, A. (2015). *More Happy than Not*. New York, NY: Soho Teen.

This novel centers on the coming out journey of a lower-class, Latinx teen who lives in a society that has developed the technological innovation of memory suppression. A harsh critique of gay conversion therapy practices, it can push readers to discuss the ways in which race, class, and masculinity modulate representations of sexual disclosure. Silvera’s novel has a devastating ending, which enables opportunities to explore who has the privilege of pursuing traditional avenues of happiness, and who is barred from this pursuit.

Konigsberg, B. (2013). *Openly Straight*. New York: Arthur A. Levine Books.

This novel focuses on an openly gay teen who decides to go back into the closet when beginning a new school year at a boarding school. This decision goes awry, however, when he falls in love with his assumedly straight classmate. Unlike *Simon VHS*, it presents coming out as a nonteleological and nonmonolithic process.

Konigsberg, B. (2017). *Honestly Ben*. New York: Arthur A. Levine Books.

The sequel to *Openly Straight*, *Honestly Ben* focuses on a teen who is attracted to both women and men. This novel's strength lies in the fact that Ben never labels his sexuality even when other people ask him to: "To me, straight and gay and bi are just words. None of them really feel like me. I'm Ben, you know?" (p. 317). This novel is remarkable because its protagonist rejects traditional labels of sexual orientation in an effort to remain free, unrestricted, and open to change.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Special thanks to Leah Phillips, Ricki Ginsberg, and Wendy Glenn for their insightful and constructive feedback on this chapter.

NOTE

1. To avoid the issues of inclusion and exclusion found in acronyms such as LGBTQ+, this discussion uses the umbrella term "queer" to refer to nonheterosexual and noncisgender characters. It uses the term Queer (with a capital Q) when referring to Queer theories, methodologies, and approaches.

REFERENCES

- Ahmed, S. (2006). Orientations: Toward a queer phenomenology. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 12(4), 543–574.
- Albertalli, B. (2015). *Simon vs. the homo sapiens agenda*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Berlanti, G. (Director). (2018). *Love, Simon* [Motion Picture]. Los Angeles, CA: Fox 2000 Pictures.
- Cart, M., & Jenkins, C. A. (2006). *The heart has its reasons: Young adult literature with gay/lesbian/queer content, 1969–2003*. Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press.
- D'Addario, D. (2018, March 8). *Love, Simon* is a groundbreaking gay movie. But do today's teens actually need it? *Time*. Retrieved from <http://time.com/5190982/love-simon-groundbreaking-gay-movie/>.
- Daniels, A. (2017). *Dreadnought*. New York, NY: Diversion Books.
- Hayn, J., & Hazlett, L. (2011). Hear us out! LGBTQ young adult literature wishes are answered! *The ALAN Review*, 38(2), 68–72.
- Jolly, M. (2001). Coming out of the coming out story: Writing queer lives. *Sexualities*, 4(4), 474–496.

- Konigsberg, B. (2013). *Openly straight*. New York, NY: Arthur A. Levine Books.
- Konigsberg, B. (2017). *Honestly Ben*. New York, NY: Arthur A. Levine Books.
- Silvera, A. (2015). *More happy than not*. New York, NY: Soho Teen.
- Thein, A. H., & Kedley, K. E. (2016). Out of the closet and all grown up: Problematizing normative narratives of coming-out and coming-of-age in young adult literature. In D. Linville & D. L. Carlson (Eds.), *Beyond borders: Queer eros and ethos (ethics) in LGBTQ young adult literature* (pp. 3–20). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Trites, R. S. (2000). *Disturbing the universe: Power and repression in adolescent literature*. Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press.

Theories of Space, Place, and Navigational Identity

Turning *Inside Out and Back Again* in the Exploration of Immigration

Wendy J. Glenn

Thanhha Lai's (2011) *Inside Out and Back Again* offers the potential for students and teachers to consider the normative assumptions we often bring to our conceptions of home and recognize (and challenge) dominant perspectives that reinforce particular ways of thinking, knowing, and doing and advance a singularly correct way of being. Given the emotionality bound to conceptions of home—feelings of connection and comfort, memories created therein, traditions that unite people within family or community—such explorations can prove challenging. Being asked to think critically about how our visions of home might be exclusionary can seem like a personal affront. This tension feels particularly poignant given the political rhetoric surrounding immigration in the United States today and the ways in which people entering the country (or seeking to enter the country) are positioned as potential threats to an “American” vision of home and the homeland.

Story offers a way for young people and their teachers to mediate these challenges, particularly given how stories can reveal the complexities inherent in locating one's self. Critical readings of texts are essential in the development of young people who can effectively engage as members not only of a democratic nation but a global society whose national borders are increasingly fluid in the exchange of information. If teachers and students do not possess adequate knowledge and understanding of cultures different from their own, especially as people who identify with these cultures become their neighbors and community members, they likely will be unable to recognize stereotypes or biases in life and the literature they read. Careful and critical study of space, place, and identity within story can help readers challenge mainstream depictions of people and places and open space for new narratives.

THEORIES OF SPACE, PLACE, AND IDENTITY

Place-based identity describes how one's personal identity can be bound to a particular place, or places. Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) first articulated how ideas

of space and place depend upon one other for definition, arguing that if “we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is a pause” (p. 6). Cresswell (2004) elaborated on this claim, noting that “When humans invest meaning in a portion of space and then become attached to it in some way . . . , it becomes place” (p. 10). This place can take the form of home, “an exemplary kind of place where people feel a sense of attachment and rootedness. . . . Home is where you can be yourself” (Cresswell, 2004, p. 24).

Massey (1991) forwarded a different vision of place, one that is “open and hybrid—a product of inter-connecting flows—of routes rather than roots,” one that “calls into question the whole history of place as a center of meaning connected to a rooted and ‘authentic’ sense of identity forever challenged by mobility” (p. 29). Unlike Tuan, Massey argued that places are “processes” (1991, p. 29) and do not have singular identities. The specificity of place, a sense of uniqueness, does exist, but it does not result from a “long, internalized history” (1991, p. 28). It is instead the result of a “distinct mixture of wider and more local social relations” (1991, p. 28). The same home, then, isn’t the same for everyone who lives there.

Considerations of space, place, and home take on unique resonance in the context of immigration when we consider the difference in experience between those who choose to leave a country and those who are forced to go. As Bhabha asks, “As the migrant and the refugee become the ‘unhomely’ inhabitants of the contemporary world, how do we rethink collective, communal concepts like homeland, the people, cultural exile?” (1994, p. 271). Cahalan (2008) argues that “for exiles who have been displaced from their homes, home is only an impossible and therefore painful memory” (p. 258). Other scholars argue, however, that home is both relative and necessary for immigrants: “In the postcolonial era, immigrants, refugees, and displaced persons especially need to find a place of their own in the world and the new identity or self that can survive there” (Chang, 2011, p. 133). Space can be reconstructed through “memory, history, culture, or imagination; in other words, home can be reconstructed. Furthermore, home is closely related to identity, which can therefore be reconstructed, too” (Chang, 2011, pp. 144–145).

To explore further how constructions of home and identity are connected, I turn to the work of Weinreich (2003, 2008, 2009). His navigational identity theory is particularly helpful in offering explanation for what might happen when individuals exist in more than one cultural space simultaneously, postulating that as people move into a new culture, they do not consciously choose to accept or reject one space over another. Instead, they identify with elements of both the new and homeland cultures when forming an identity, often creating a sense of self comprising multiple, sometimes inconsistent, understandings and values.

Navigational identity theory recognizes the influence of others as essential to the process of identity construction. Upon migrating, an individual meets a wide array of others, some of whom share values associated with the individual’s culture and some of whom are more aligned in perspectives and values

with the institutions of the receiving community. When an individual repeatedly experiences incompatibilities with others or “when other people view oneself as a member of a social group in ways that are grossly discrepant from one’s own view of self as member of that group” (2003, p. 68), a threatened identity might result. This disconnect can result in a vulnerability of identity on behalf of the individual who feels unable to reconcile the seemingly incompatible and improper appraisals of self. The individual might accept that another’s view has validity, experience a sense of disconnection and resulting shame, or reject another’s view and advocate for the self, thus defending the individual’s integrity of identity.

Navigational identity theory also considers the influence of homeland experiences, particularly those lived during childhood, on constructions of identity. The theory suggests that a young person’s “early identifications with kith and kin” are not inherently stable or “emotionally intense and unquestioned” (2008) and that those who most successfully navigate multiple spaces hold “an understanding of the historical complexities of nationality” (2008) and a more questioning stance toward what they were taught by their parents, guardians, and elders. They are more situationalist in their ability to adapt, recognizing the socially constructed nature of the group to which they belong and the group to which they are working to belong.

INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

The activities below draw upon theories of space, place, and identity and forward a place-based pedagogy that is oriented to the local, lived experiences of students and offers space for critical exploration of the structures that afford and limit power in particular places (Gruenewald, 2003). This approach honors the experiences of students as members of a local community and as individuals whose beliefs, values, and perceptions may align with or come into conflict with those of the local community. Critical perspectives on place-based education “call for educators to remain attentive to the political geography of difference not only among places, but also within places. In this way, they make necessary space for critical multicultural and other anti-oppressive considerations in place-based approaches to learning” (Ball & Lai, 2006, p. 270).

Defining Home

In preparation for reading *Inside Out and Back Again*, teachers might ask students to locate an image that captures for them the concept of “home.” This might be a photograph that students themselves have taken or found elsewhere, a drawing or piece of visual art, etc. Teachers might then ask students to engage in the following: Considering the image you selected, write individually in response to the question, What about this process of photo selection was interesting or challenging or surprising? Teachers might then invite students to share the images they have selected and/or their responses to the opening

question. They might then ask students to participate in a whole-class discussion around the following: Do you conceive of home as a physical structure (house), geographical location (point on a map), more abstract concept (site of memory making), or something else? What happens when we search online images for the word *home*? What about for the question, *Where is home*? What do these images suggest about our societal vision of home? Is your vision of home singular or plural?

Considering the Complexities of Home

In our attempts to know those we meet, we often ask, “Where are you from?” To help students consider the complexity inherent in answering this question before they begin reading the novel, teachers might invite them to silently read and annotate the opening pages of Khoury’s (2010) article, “Where Are You From?: Writing Home in Palestinian Children’s Literature.” Students might then work in small groups to generate a comment, question, and concern related to the excerpt. They might then come together as a whole to share and discuss what they generated and connect their ideas to the author’s words at the start of *Inside Out and Back Again*: “To the millions of refugees in the world, may you each find a home.” Guiding questions might include: What does it mean to find a home? What elements of our identities are connected to particular places? Do our identities change when we leave these places?

Navigating Cultural Identities across Spaces

Upon reading the novel, students might explore how Hà’s relationship with her home is both challenging and complicated. Teachers might invite students to consider the idea that as people move into a new cultural space, they identify with elements of their new and homeland cultures when forming an identity and that this process can lead to a real and/or perceived sense of loss. Teachers might help students consider this loss and/or revision of cultural identity in *Inside Out and Back Again* by engaging with questions centered on key passages drawn from various points in the novel.

1. Hà not only leaves her home; her home is lost to her. As a result of the military invasion, she reports, “It’s over;/Saigon is gone” (p. 69). And then, “After two weeks at sea/the commander calls/all of us above deck/for a formal lowering of/our yellow flag/with three red stripes./South Vietnam no longer exists” (p. 85).

Guiding Questions: Would your home be the same home if you woke up to learn that the United States no longer existed as a nation? To what extent are your identities shaped by beliefs, views, and perspectives that might be seen as uniquely “American”? What historical examples can we identify that reveal attempts by those in positions of power to erase, replace, or convolute national identity?

2. Hà experiences a loss of cultural identity when she begins her education in the United States. She describes feeling stupid when she reads children's books to learn English, despite her strong reading ability in Vietnamese. She angrily notes, "I can't read/a baby book./Who will believe/I was reading/Nhất Linh?/But then,/who here knows/who he is?" (p. 130). This same sense of frustration around being alone in her cultural knowledge is seen when she enters the cafeteria: "I don't know where to sit/any more than/I know how to eat/the pink sausage/snuggled inside bread/shaped like a corn cob,/smeared with sauces/yellow and red./I think/they are making fun/of the Vietnamese flag/until I remember/no one here likely knows/that flag's colors" (p. 144).

Guiding Questions: How does Hà see herself in the context of school? How does she imagine that others see her? How does Hà see them? How does Hà work to reconcile these differing appraisals of who she is?

3. Hà and her family must navigate their cultural identities outside of their cultural home. Sometimes in order to fit it, they choose identities and engage in cultural practices that reflect the views and values of those they encounter. After waiting for some time for a sponsor, for example, "Mother learns/[that] sponsors prefer those/whose applications say 'Christians.'/Just like that/Mother amends our faith/saying all beliefs/are pretty much the same" (p. 108). And after a rock is thrown through the front window of the home in which they are staying, they choose to be baptized: "Our cowboy says/our neighbors/would be more like neighbors/if we agree to something/at the Del Ray Southern Baptist Church" (p. 169).

Guiding Questions: What does Mother sacrifice in making these decisions? How does she explain her choices? How does having to make these choices reflect the complexity of trying to navigate a new space? How are the identities of Hà and her family shaped by the norms and values of others? Does this feel right to you?

4. The traditions that were so strongly present during Hà's growing up years in Vietnam have to change. She watches her mother engage in a traditional prayer; it is the same but not the same: "*Clang clang clang*,/a spoon chimes/against a glass bowl./Nothing like/clear-stream bell echoes/from a brass gong./Instead of jasmine incense,/Mother burns dried orange peels./Ashy bitter citrus/invades our room./Nothing like/the floral wafts/ that once calmed me" (pp. 173–174). And at the novel's conclusion, Hà describes the new way of celebrating Tết, the Vietnamese New Year, in this new place where traditional foods are not readily available. As a part of the ceremony, her mother makes a prediction for the new year. "Our lives/will twist and twist/intermingling the old and the new/until it doesn't matter/which is which" (p. 257).

Guiding Questions: In the Author's Note, Thanhha Lai explains that this story is important for helping preserve her family's history; her nieces and nephews "may know in general where their parents came from, but they can't really imagine the noises and smells of Vietnam, the daily challenges of starting over in a strange land" (p. 262). What stories do you know about those in your family who came before you? What might knowing these stories do to enrich your life? Why might remembering be an important process?

Unpacking Assumptions

Hà and her family hold assumptions about life in the United States. Brother VŨ wants to touch the "same ground/where Bruce Lee walked" (p. 45). And when deciding where to settle upon leaving Vietnam, Hà's mother chooses the United States based upon her hopes for her sons' educations: "*My sons/must first go to college./If they're smart/America will give them/scholarships*" (p. 106). In reality, however, the United States is not the land of dreams. Hà describes the place as follows: "Green mats of grass/in front of every house./Vast windows/in front of sealed curtains./Cement lanes where/no one walks./Big cars/pass not often./Not a noise./Clean, quiet/loneliness" (p. 122). She learns, too, that her family's sponsor is not the cowboy she envisioned and admired and that even the animals in the United States are unfamiliar. When her brother tells her, "*No, Mr. Johnston/doesn't have a horse,/nor has he ever ridden one,*" she wonders, "What kind of cowboy is he?/To make it worse,/the cowboy explains/horses here go/*neigh, neigh, neigh,*/not *hee, hee, hee.*/No they don't./Where am I?" (p. 134).

The people Hà meets in the United States hold assumptions about her homeland that fail to reflect the complexity she knows of this place. To help her classmates better understand Hà's story, Hà's teacher "shows the class/photos/ of a burned, naked girl/running, crying/down a dirt road/of people climbing, screaming,/desperate to get on/the last helicopter/out of Saigon/of skeletal refugees,/crammed aboard a/sinking fishing boat,/reaching up to the heavens/for help/. . . She's telling the class/where I'm from." Hà argues, however, that "She should have shown/something about/papayas and Têt" (pp. 194–195). Hà learns, too, that the conflict in Vietnam was felt not only by her family and those left behind but by those from the United States who served in the military. Miss Washington, a kind neighbor who helps Hà learn to read English, tells Hà of her son's death, Hà ponders, "I had not known of her son Tom/or of his death as a/twenty-year-old soldier/in the very place/where I was born./I never thought/the name of my country/could sound so sad" (p. 200).

To encourage consideration of the tension between the assumptions we hold around a particular place and the reality of life for those who live there, teachers might invite students to research their own communities. They might explore websites sponsored by the city or town, Chamber of Commerce, and/or

Department of Tourism or gather brochures and pamphlets that feature things to do and see in their region to determine how their communities are portrayed to outsiders. Students might then talk together about whether these materials reflect their experiences as inhabitants. Do they see themselves in these materials? Would they describe their community in the same way? What insider information do they possess that might extend or challenge these depictions? What is the role of truth-telling in this “come and visit our place” genre of writing?

Honoring Individual Experiences

Upon completion of the novel, teachers might encourage students to more broadly consider how our experiences of place shape how we see ourselves, others, and our world and how the language we use to make sense of these experiences matters. Teachers might begin by asking students to individually record a few words that come to mind when they think of the place, *barn*. Teachers might then ask students to read silently and then listen along to a reading of Lux’s (1997) poem, “The Voice You Hear When You Read Silently” (www.tnellen.com/cybereng/poetry/lux.html). Conversation might then center on our individual and collective conceptions of the word *barn*—how they are the same and different, whether they were captured in the author’s imagery, from where they might originate, and whether they might change over time. Students might then be encouraged to select individually a place-based word that they feel is loaded, one filled with meaning and personal relevance and resonance. They might write a poem, narrative, or argument around their selection of this word; seek out the origin of the word and its varied uses across languages; or design a class webpage that invites family and community members to wander through and wonder about various conceptions of student-selected “places.”

Careful considerations of space, place, and identity in literature extend beyond the analysis of setting to uncover the complex relationship between who we are, where we’re from, and where we live now. Such explorations in the context of multicultural young adult literature featuring the experiences of protagonists who are immigrants can foster opportunities for learning, connection, empathy, and understanding in all readers and invite challenges to unfair and destructive portrayals of immigrants who live beyond the pages of story.

SEE ALSO

Abdel-Fattah, R. (2017). *The lines we cross*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

When Michael, son of the founder of an Australian anti-immigration organization, and Mina, an Afghani refugee, fall in love, they face discrimination resulting from intolerance but choose empathy over hate. As Michael and Mina navigate their relationship, they also navigate questions of space, place, and identity.

This YA novel asks readers to consider how narratives of unfamiliar others are perpetuated across generations and how blind commitments to nationalism can advance dangerously generalized views of groups of people.

Farrish, T. (2012). *The good braider*. Amazon: Skyscape.

The Good Braider traces in verse the experiences of 16-year-old Viola as she and her family flee civil war in Sudan and, after an arduous journey, resettle within a large Sudanese community in Maine. Viola's story documents honestly and uncomfortably the necessity, hardship, and heartbreak of leaving home in response to war. Finding safety in a new place does not erase the challenges of navigating cultural contradictions and the tensions between a mother's expectations and a daughter's desire for something different.

Perkins, M. (2017). *You bring the distant near*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

You Bring the Distant Near alternates between the voices of two sisters and their respective daughters to explore the hopes and challenges of immigration across three generations of young Indian women. This YA novel explores the process of naming and creating a new home following the decision to leave a homeland. It suggests how space, place, home, and identity can be reconstructed through memory, history, culture, and imagination.

Saedi, S. (2018). *Americanized: Rebel without a green card*. New York, NY: Knopf.

When Sara Saedi was two, her parents fled Iran with her and her older sister, and when she was ten, she learned that she and her family held undocumented status in the United States; with humor and honesty, Saedi describes her journey to secure a green card—and navigate life as a teenager who is both Iranian and American. This YA memoir invites complex consideration of how one might answer the question, "Where are you from?" In addition to offering a particular story, it addresses issues that touch on immigration more broadly, including the relationship between identity and legality and resources for immigrants unsure of how to navigate documentation processes.

Guerrero, D., with Moroz, E. (2018). *My family divided: One girl's journey of home, loss, and hope*. New York, NY: Henry Holt.

My Family Divided documents the experiences of Diane Guerrero who, at 14 years old, returned home from school one day to find that her parents had been taken, detained, and deported. This middle-grade memoir addresses how one's status in a place can have profound implications on one's identity. Guerrero educates readers about the fear of being stopped by immigration, the obstacles that immigrants face in securing documentation, and the emotional trauma experienced by young people not often part of the policy conversation.

REFERENCES

- Ball, E. L., & Lai, A. (2006). Place-based pedagogy for the arts and humanities. *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture*, 6(2), 261–287.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). Frontlines/Borderposts. In A. Bhammer (Ed.), *Displacements: Cultural identities in question* (pp. 269–272). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Cahalan, J. M. (2008). Teaching hometown literature: A pedagogy of place. *College English*, 70(3), 249–274.
- Chang, L. P. (2011). (Re)location of home in Louise Erdrich's *The game of silence*. *Children's Literature in Education*, 42, 132–147.
- Cresswell, T. (2004). *Place: A short introduction*. Maiden, MA: Blackwell.
- Gruenewald, D. A. (2003). The best of both worlds: A critical pedagogy of place. *Educational Researcher*, 32, 3–12.
- Khoury, N. N. (2010). Where are you from?: Writing home in Palestinian children's literature. *Third Text*, 24(6), 697–718.
- Lai, T. (2011). *Inside out and back again*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Lux, T. (1997). The voice you hear when you read silently. In *New and selected poems, 1975–1995*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin.
- Massey, D. (1991). A global sense of place. *Marxism Today*, 38, 24–29.
- Tuan, Y. (1977). *Space and place: The perspective of experience*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Weinreich, P. (2003). Identity structure analysis. In P. Weinreich & W. Saunderson (Eds.), *Analysing identity: Cross-cultural, societal and clinical contexts* (pp. 7–76). London, UK: Routledge.
- Weinreich, P. (2008). *Cross-cultural to clinical psychology: The identity structure analysis conceptual framework* [Powerpoint slides]. Retrieved from <http://slideplayer.com/slide/6390948/>.
- Weinreich, P. (2009). “Enculturation,” not “acculturation”: Conceptualising and assessing identity processes in migrant communities. *International Journal of Inter-cultural Relations*, 33, 124–139.

Teaching #BlackLivesMatter and #SayHerName

Interrogating Historical Violence against Black Women in *Copper Sun*

Chonika Coleman-King and Susan L. Groenke

#BLACKLIVESMATTER

There is a long history of violence against black bodies in the United States (Goff, Eberhardt, Williams, & Jackson, 2008). This more recent history has led to the formation of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, an expression of frustration, rage, and protest regarding the failure of systems of the state to protect and value the lives of black people. The main impetus of the BLM movement is to humanize black people and make evident the physical and psychological suffering black people have faced over time. According to the founding black, queer women of the BLM movement, “Black Lives Matter is an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of Black folks’ contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression” (Garza, 2014, p. 24).

BLM activists have called on teachers to educate students about the BLM movement’s central beliefs and practices, and have created BLM-inspired curriculum for students in elementary grades through college levels (e.g., Pitts, 2017b). The aim of much of this curriculum is not just to teach about racism, but also to “point to solutions and methods of action so our students don’t become disillusioned . . . Bringing this movement to the classroom can open the door to larger conversations about truth, justice, activism, healing and reconciliation” (Pitts, 2017b).

#SAYHERNAME

While the BLM movement gained significant visibility and momentum around the killing of unarmed black men by police and other vigilantes, there has been a notable silence around violence directed toward black women. The BLM

movement has shifted the issue of police brutality against black communities to a level of public acknowledgment not seen since the days of the first televised civil rights marches in the 1960s; however, even then, the black women whose lives were taken by police brutality were rarely discussed.

The death of Sandra Bland in 2015, which received more media attention than any other black woman victim of police brutality, set off the spark from which the #SayHerName movement began. At protests following the discovery of her body hanging in a Texas jail cell after her arrest during a routine traffic stop, protesters chanted “#SayHerName,” invoking the need to acknowledge black women who are victims of police brutality. According to the African American Policy Forum, black women are killed by police in disproportionate numbers: Black women and girls are only 13% of the female population but account for a third of all women shot to death by the police (African American Policy Forum).

The current BLM and SHN movements have placed an emphasis on examining excessive and lethal force used by police and have brought attention to the distinctly different ways in which individuals view violence against black bodies (Burton, 2015). Many white people continue to see the use of excessive and lethal force against black people as justified, and people of color generally view similar acts as racially charged, criminal acts punishable by law (Obasogie & Newman, 2016). This points to the fact that, as Pitts (2017a) explains, “Without an understanding of the ever-present effects of slavery and the systems that have been built to protect and preserve the devaluing and oppression of black bodies, BLM [and SHN] . . . will never be understood.”

In this chapter, we share how we invoke both BLM and SHN pedagogies in our work with pre-service teachers. Specifically, we describe a small-group, literature circle strategy inspired by the work of Harvey Daniels’s literature circles (1994) and Paulo Freire’s culture circle model (1974/1976) that we use to teach Sharon Draper’s historical fiction young adult (YA) novel *Copper Sun* (2008) to beginning teachers in hopes that they can envision and will enact similar practices in their future secondary English language arts (ELA) classrooms.

Copper Sun spotlights the horrors of the African slave trade, as witnessed by a 15-year-old adolescent girl, Amari, who is brutally beaten, branded, and stolen from her African village where her family and other villagers are murdered; she is subsequently sold into slavery. Amari survives multiple rapes on the Middle Passage, only to be purchased by Mr. Derby, a Southern plantation owner, and given to the his son, Clay, as a “gift” for his 16th birthday. With approval from his father, Clay rapes Amari repeatedly. On the plantation, Amari struggles to hold on to memories of home and her self-worth but finds strength and friendship in unexpected places. Ultimately, she escapes toward freedom.

We use this novel to help our students begin to understand the legacy of state-sanctioned violence against black girls and women—a legacy that was established to both rationalize and enforce slavery. As we describe below, this legacy is often ignored in school textbooks.

WHY *COPPER SUN*?

Copper Sun is an important text to teach in the secondary ELA classroom for several reasons. First, we know that most school textbooks devote very little attention to the racial history of the United States. Instead, the official school curriculum relies on one-dimensional hero-ification narratives, such as the moment Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat. In addition, slave life as described in history textbooks is “usually void of the brutality of slave culture” (King, Davis, and Brown, 2012, p. 368).

When black history does make it into textbooks, it is often given little context and positioned in negative ways (Sanchez & Hagopian, 2018), which can impede students’ ability to recognize connections between the past and present conditions. Without historical knowledge, young people might even be inclined to agree with the rapper Kanye West’s recent supposition that slavery was indeed a “choice” (Kaur, 2018).

SAY AMARI’S NAME: THE LITERATURE CIRCLE ACTIVITY WITH *COPPER SUN*

As a recent survey of 1,000 high school seniors suggests (Swaak, 2018), problematic school textbooks that omit facts and “gloss over” the history of slavery in the US result in young people knowing very little about slavery’s origins and the government’s role in perpetuating it. Problematic school textbooks also contribute to students thinking racism is a thing of the past. As such, BLM teacher and activist Daniel Wallace (2016) explains that today’s students need time to learn about the socio-historical circumstances that inform and shape the current BLM and SHN movements.

One of these socio-historical circumstances is state-sanctioned violence against the bodies of black women and girls that was (and continues to be) justified through the circulation of racial tropes and stereotypical characterizations (e.g., African women positioned as hypersexual Jezebels). As Wallace explains, “These characterizations served to support the idea that African . . . women were incapable of controlling themselves without the structure and monitoring provided by enslavement” (p. 32). Therefore, as Ida B. Wells testified, rape was a justified form of social control over black women during slavery and the Jim Crow era. Today, social control of black women and girls takes the form of overrepresentation in school disciplinary sanctions, imprisonment, physical assault by police, sexual harassment, and rape. Additionally, there are many cases where the abuse of black men—the sons, brothers, fathers, and partners of black women—is also weaponized against black women as a form of social control as they are often forced to witness black men’s victimization.

The small-group literature circle strategy we describe in this chapter engages students in close readings of and dialogue about *Copper Sun*, which depicts a very different story of slavery, shining a necessary spotlight on the brutality and violence of slavery as experienced by African girls and women. As Baxley

and Boston (2014) explain, *Copper Sun* “repositions the black woman in slavery, according to her new status as a whole woman with a gender identity completely her own” (p. 25). As such, the book challenges common images and ideas that insist enslaved women were one-dimensional figures of America’s historical past.

We use a small-group literature strategy to discuss *Copper Sun* for various reasons. We know that literature study circles have been found to increase student enjoyment of and engagement in reading (Fox & Wilkinson, 1997), increase multicultural awareness (Hansen-Krening, 1997), promote other perspectives on social issues (Noll, 1994), and promote gender equity in the ELA classroom (Evans, Alvermann, & Anders, 1998).

But we also know that *Copper Sun* can be difficult to read, as students may be learning about the violent realities of slavery for the first time, and depending on their histories and positionalities, students may experience and respond to *Copper Sun* in diverse ways (Ricker-Wilson, 1998). Working in small groups—rather than as a whole class—may alleviate some discomfort students experience reading and talking about the book.

Ultimately, our main goal for the small-group literature circle is dialogue, which the educational activist and theorist Paulo Freire believed was another way of knowing the world. Dialogue was central to Freire’s culture circle model, as he believed it was through dialogue that students can challenge beliefs and realities commonly perceived as static (Freire, 1974/1976). As such, we understand that dialogue is more than “side-by-side monologue in which two or more individuals seek to stand their ground” (Souto-Manning, 2010, p. 39). Rather, dialogue is a learning process and considers multiple perspectives as fundamental. In genuine dialogue, we strive to understand others’ perspectives, and ultimately, collectively imagine how to “take agentive roles and transform realities” (Souto-Manning, 2010, p. 39).

To get students started with dialogue about the sensitive topics addressed in *Copper Sun*, we use Daniels’s (1994) model of small-group book clubs, or literature circles. Daniels advises that literature circles be kept small, ideally three to four students. Daniels also explains that literature circle *roles* can act as “book club training wheels” to help structure the group activity, and he describes the four “basic” roles that can be used to structure the small-group literature discussion (i.e., connector, questioner, literary luminary, and illustrator).

We modify Daniels’s literature circle roles to include two historical connectors (to research and extend historical evidence), a literary luminary (to perform in-depth analysis of powerful passages in the text), an artist (to build upon various art forms like music, textiles, photography, poetry, and dance relevant to the text), and a travel tracer (to identify the geographic movement of characters throughout the text in order to contextualize their experiences). Students are asked to prepare for their roles as a part of required homework and to come to class ready to talk about their findings for 8–10 minutes each in small groups. In addition, we also ask students to write a series of personal

journal entries as they read *Copper Sun*, responding to their own emotions and burgeoning understandings as they read the novel, thinking about what they want to share and dialogue about in their small groups; and reflecting on their small-group dialogues.

In the literature circles, we ask students to specifically zero in on the violent acts that occur throughout *Copper Sun*, with special attention to the violent acts committed against Amari and other women in the story. We ask students to #SayHerName. We pose history-based questions for the connector roles, which require students to research the slave trade, the Middle Passage, and white slave-owners' rationalization of slavery, rape, whippings, and murder. As an example, one student who is assigned to be the historical connector is tasked with the following:

In Part II of the book, we see Amari sold at slave auction. She is referred to and treated like an animal (potential buyers put their fingers in her mouth and touch her breasts and legs), and she is called a "savage," who is "ready for childbearing." Mr. Derby wants Polly to "civilize" Amari. Polly wonders if "Negroes from Africa had feelings and intelligent thoughts or if that gibberish they spoke was more like the screaming of monkeys or the barking of dogs."

(p. 78)

In your group, dialogue about your reactions to this passage. Find out more about who the slave-buyers and slave-owners were in the US. How did slave-buyers and slave-owners rationalize slavery? Why did they believe Africans to be uncivilized savages? Where did such ideas/beliefs come from? Do these beliefs linger today?

Another student assigned to this role is encouraged to consider:

In Part I of the book, we see Amari raped repeatedly while she is on the slave ship. In Part II of the book, we see Mr. Derby purchase Amari as a present for his son's 16th birthday. As Part II ends, Clay Derby has summoned "Myna" [Clay's name for Amari—a derivative of the word "mine"] to his room. Mr. Derby tells Clay: "Black women are different, you know, Clay. They like it when you pick them out for special favors at night. It keeps them happy . . . and it reminds them in a very special way who is the master and who is the slave."

(p. 86)

In your group, dialogue about your reactions to this passage. Find out more about the rape and sexual abuse that slave girls and women were subjected to during slavery. Why did slave-owners believe they had the right to rape slave girls and women? How did they rationalize rape? What happened to the children borne from the rape of slave women?

As a result of students taking on these roles, journaling extensively, and facilitating dialogue on these topics with their small-group peers, students often move into another phase of Freire’s culture circle model: problem-posing, which can lead to students’ problem-solving and taking social action. We can see such problem-posing at work in the following dialogue, where students in one small group consider what they did (and didn’t learn) about slavery in their own secondary school history classes:

Student 1: I never realized that women slaves were raped each night on the ships to America . . .

Student 2: That description of the Middle Passage really challenged what I already knew. Obviously, in school we learn some about the Middle Passage . . .

Student 3: I had no idea how gruesome it truly was.

Student 2: I think our teachers sugarcoat that section of history.

Student 1: It was hard for me to believe that the sailors raped the women and girls every night. It was hard for me to believe that they just threw dead bodies overboard. It was hard for me to believe it all.

Student 2: Why don’t we learn this in our history classes? People gotta know this history.

Student 3: We get basic facts. Basic facts about the slave trade.

Student 1: We learn about the Civil Rights Movement.

Student 3: Harriet Tubman. We only skim the surface.

Student 2: Students deserve the truth.

Student 1: This book makes me realize I am missing a huge part.

AFTER *COPPER SUN*

Students’ questions and problem-posing in their small-group literature circles often lead to important discussions about who makes decisions about school history curricula and history textbooks; whose versions of slavery get represented in history textbooks; how and why slavery gets positioned in certain ways; what young people should learn about slavery; and why the violent histories of slavery—especially for black girls and women—are silenced. In conjunction with these discussions, we share with students several contemporary, controversial instances of school textbooks that “gloss over” the ugly realities of slavery or do not include accurate information at all (e.g., Grochowski, 2016; Peterson, 2018; Watson, Hagopian, & Au, 2018).

We believe this work can begin to help students understand the historical legacy of slavery and its state-sanctioned system of terror and violence against black girls and women, and also help students begin to interrogate the silences, lack of representation, and misrepresentations that exist around the violent history of slavery in school textbooks and curricula.

We think a good next move in the classroom after reading *Copper Sun* is to consider how BLM and state-sanctioned violence against black bodies have

been taken up in contemporary YA literature. This presents an opportunity for teachers to highlight a problematic trend in the genre of YA literature itself: the absence of contemporary YA novels that center black girls' experiences as victims of police brutality and sexual assault.

WHERE ARE THE GIRLS OF COLOR IN BLM YA LITERATURE?

Several examples of contemporary YA novels that feature young males of color as victims of police brutality exist (see the "See Also" box). Yet, to date, no young black girl's experience as a victim of police brutality or sexual assault is memorialized in the contemporary YA genre, although girls from marginalized communities are most at risk of being victims of sexual assault and police brutality. As Froio (2017) explains:

Black girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual assault because society hypersexualizes them, exploits them, and deems them less worthy of protection, but YA books about . . . assault culture position straight, white, cisgender, middle class girls as "universal" stand-ins for all survivors.

We think this is another problem to pose to students, to get them considering: "Why do you think the silencing of the assault experiences of girls and women of color is happening today (in society? In school textbooks? In the YA publishing industry)? Why are girls of color deemed 'less worthy of protection?' Do black girls' lives matter?" (Souto-Manning, 2010). By posing such questions, teachers can begin to help students consider the different ways women and girls are targeted by assault culture, especially by considering how race, sexuality, and other facets of oppression factor into assault, trauma, and healing.

Teachers can also share the real-life stories of black girls and women memorialized in a May 2015 brief entitled, "Say Her Name": Resisting Police Brutality against Black Women." The brief is described as a resource "to help ensure that Black women's stories are integrated into demands for justice, policy responses to police violence, and media representations of victims of police brutality" (African American Policy Forum).

Ultimately, teachers must help students make important connections between state-sanctioned forms of physical violence practiced during the slave era, violence against black bodies that continues today through excessive and lethal force used by the police, and the ongoing silence that exists around black girls' and women's experiences of rape, sexual assault, and police brutality. Teachers must help students understand that hurtful and dehumanizing beliefs and discourses about girls and women of color started long ago, with the founding of our country, and they continue today. But they can be disrupted and resisted if we believe #BlackLivesMatter and learn to #SayHerName in secondary classrooms.

SEE ALSO

Crutcher, K. (Ed.) (2017). *The day Tajon got shot*. Washington, DC: Shout Mouse. In March 2015, ten teen girls from Beacon House in Washington, DC, started writing a novel about police brutality, taking on the perspectives of multiple characters. This text could be used in a small-group literature circle activity exploring the Black Lives Matter movement in contemporary YA fiction.

Magoon, K. (2014). *How it went down*. New York, NY: Square Fish. Through 18 different voices, readers witness the effects of trauma on a community after Tariq, a 16-year-old black boy, is shot to death by a white man. This text could be used in a small-group literature circle activity exploring the Black Lives Matter movement in contemporary YA fiction.

Medina, T., Jennings, J., & Robinson, S. (2017). *I am Alfonso Jones*. New York, NY: Lee & Low.

This graphic novel focuses on police brutality and the Black Lives Matter movement. It could be used in a small-group literature circle activity exploring the Black Lives Matter movement in contemporary YA fiction.

Reynolds, J., & Kiely, B. (2015). *All-American boys*. New York, NY: Atheneum/Caitlyn Dlouhy.

In this multi-voiced novel, two teen males—one black, one white—grapple with the repercussions of police brutality. This text could be used in a small-group literature circle activity exploring the Black Lives Matter movement in contemporary YA fiction.

Rhodes, J.P. (2018). *Ghost boys*. New York, NY: Little, Brown.

When 12-year-old Jerome is killed by a police officer who mistakes his toy gun for a real threat, he becomes a ghost and observes the devastation that has been unleashed on his family and community in the wake of what they see as an unjust and brutal killing. This text could be used in a small-group literature circle activity exploring the Black Lives Matter movement in contemporary YA fiction.

Stone, N. (2017). *Dear Martin*. New York, NY: Crown.

Justyce McAllister is a good kid, an honor student, and always there to help a friend—but none of that matters to the police officer who just put him in handcuffs. This text could be used in a small-group literature circle activity exploring the Black Lives Matter movement in contemporary YA fiction.

Thomas, A. (2017). *The hate u give*. New York, NY: Balzer + Bray.

When Starr witnesses the fatal shooting of her childhood best friend Khalil at the hands of a police officer, she must choose between her own safety and justice. This text could be used in a small-group literature circle activity exploring the Black Lives Matter movement in contemporary YA fiction.

REFERENCES

- African American Policy Forum. #SayHerName. Retrieved from www.aapf.org/say-hername/.
- Baxley, T. P., & Boston, G. H. (2014). *(In)visible presence: Feminist counter-narratives of young adult literature by women of color*. New Milford, CT: Sense Publishers.
- Burton, O. (2015). *Black lives matter: A critique of anthropology*. Fieldsights—Hot Spots, Cultural Anthropology Online. Retrieved from <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/691-black-lives-matter-a-critique-of-anthropology>.
- Daniels, H. (1994). *Literature circles: Voice and choice in literature circles and reading groups*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
- Draper, S. (2008). *Copper sun*. New York, NY: Atheneum.
- Evans, K. S., Alvermann, D., & Anders, P. L. (1998). Literature discussion groups: An examination of gender roles. *Reading Research & Instruction*, 37(2), 107–122.
- Freire, P. (1974/1976). *Education: The practice of freedom*. London, UK: Writers and Readers.
- Froio, N. (2017, October 25). *White trauma: How YA books about rape ignore girls of color*. Retrieved from www.bitchmedia.org/article/girls-of-color-rape-narratives.
- Fox, M., & Wilkinson, L. (1997). No longer travelers in a strange country. *Journal of Children's Literature*, 23(1), 6–15.
- Garza, A. (2014). A herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter movement. In J. Hobson (Ed.), *Are all the women still white? Rethinking race, expanding feminisms* (pp. 23–28). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Goff, P. A., Eberhardt, J. L., Williams, M. J., & Jackson, M. C. (2008). Not yet human: Implicit knowledge, historical dehumanization, and contemporary consequences. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 94(2), 292–306.
- Grochowski, S. (2016, December 7). *Fourth grade textbook saying slaves were like “family” pulled from Connecticut school district*. Retrieved from www.nydailynews.com/news/national/textbook-pulled-complaint-slaves-family-article-1.2902177.
- Hansen-Krening, N., & Mizokawa, D. T. (1997). Exploring ethnic-specific literature: A unity of parents, families, and educators. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 41(3), 180–189.
- Kaur, H. (2018, May 4). *Kanye West just said 400 years of slavery was a choice*. Retrieved from www.cnn.com/2018/05/01/entertainment/kanye-west-slavery-choice-trnd/index.html.
- King, L. J., Davis, C., & Brown, A. L. (2012). African American history, race and textbooks: An examination of the works of Harold O. Rugg and Carter G. Woodson. *Journal of Social Studies Research*, 35(4), 359–386.
- Noll, E. (1994). Social issues and literature circles with adolescents. *Journal of Reading*, 38(2), 88–93.
- Obasogie, O. K., & Newman, Z. (2016). Black Lives Matter and respectability politics in local news accounts of officer-involved civilian deaths: An early empirical assessment. *Wisconsin Law Review*, 2016(3), 541–572.
- Peterson, B. (2018). Presidents and slaves: Helping students find the truth. In D. Watson, J. Hagopian, & W. Au (Eds.), *Teaching for black lives* (pp. 88–95). Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools.
- Pitts, J. (2017a, Summer). *Why teaching about Black Lives Matter matters—Part I*. Retrieved from www.tolerance.org/magazine/summer-2017/why-teaching-black-lives-matter-matters-part-i.

- Pitts, J. (2017b, Summer). *Bringing Black Lives Matter into the classroom—Part II*. Retrieved from www.tolerance.org/magazine/summer-2017/bringing-black-lives-matter-into-the-classroom-part-ii.
- Ricker-Wilson, C. (1998). When the mockingbird becomes an albatross: Reading and resistance in the language arts classroom. *English Journal*, 87(3), 67–72.
- Sanchez, A., & Hagopian, J. (2018). What we don't learn about the Black Panther party—but should. In D. Watson, J. Hagopian, & W. Au (Eds.), *Teaching for black lives* (pp. 140–149). Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools.
- Souto-Manning, M. (2010). *Freire, teaching, and learning: Culture circles across contexts*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Swaak, T. (2018, February 1). *A survey asked high schoolers about slavery, revealing widespread confusion*. Retrieved from www.newsweek.com/high-school-students-confusion-about-slavery-797707.
- Wallace, D. M. (2016). Liberation through education: Teaching #BlackLivesMatter in Africana studies. *Radical Teacher*, 106, 29–39.
- Watson, D., Hagopian, J., & Au, W. (Eds.). (2018). *Teaching for black lives*. Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools.

Critical Race English Education

Engaging with Hip-Hop, Resistance, and Remix in *All American Boys* and Viral YouTube Videos

Rachel L. Rickard Rebellino,
Karly Marie Grice, and Caitlin E. Murphy

In their poignant editorial in *English Education*, Baker-Bell, Butler, and Johnson (2017) address the bombardment of images and stories of Black death in the media and the unpunished systemic culpability of police brutality in those narratives. Butler's words reverberated through our field: "Whose job is it to protect our children and ourselves? What is academia doing if it isn't saving the lives of our children?" (Baker-Bell, Butler et al., 2017, pp. 121–122). As teachers, we ponder the following: How do we keep in mind the implications of the texts we teach (and don't teach) and the contexts we acknowledge (and don't acknowledge)? How do we use conversations around these texts to address the curricular sidestepping of "controversial topics" that have diminished our marginalized students and protected "White Fragility" (DiAngelo, 2011) through buffers of silence?

To begin answering these questions, we utilize a Critical Race English Education (CREE) framework, which asks educators to recognize the role they play in "naming and dismantling white supremacy and anti-Black and anti-Brown racism" (Baker-Bell, Butler et al., 2017, p. 123). A CREE stance seeks out pedagogical tools that both *heal* ("acknowledging that the wound exists and identifying its culprit") and *transform* ("responding to the wound using a tool that works to transform the conditions that led to the wound") (Baker-Bell, Stanbrough, & Everett, 2017, p. 139). In this chapter, we offer examples of healing and transforming tools that can be used to address police brutality. We center our discussion on Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely's (2015) *All American Boys*, a collaboration written in response to the murders of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown, which we place into dialogue with YouTube star Todrick Hall's music videos. First, we offer a critical content analysis of *All American Boys* as both a healing and transformative text. In this section, we

explore how the book makes the existence and intersecting causes of police brutality clear for all readers, and we highlight examples of youth activism and agency. Then, we offer multimodal instructional strategies that analyze Hall's videos in the context of healing and transformative pedagogies. In particular, we provide examples of two videos—one that visually portrays the same wounds narratively constructed in *All American Boys* and one that models the power of remixing story and style. Altogether, we offer activities that can be used with not only Reynolds and Kiely's book but also with a range of texts (see the "See Also" box) in order to combat oppression and silencing in the classroom and to amplify the voices of young people.

HEALING AND TRANSFORMING IN *ALL AMERICAN BOYS*

All American Boys is written in the dual perspectives of high school students Rashad and Quinn, who are Black and white, respectively. En route to the same party, Rashad stops at a convenience store for a snack; separately, Quinn heads to the convenience store intending to convince someone to buy him beer. While inside, Rashad is accused of stealing by a police officer who brutally beats him. Quinn witnesses the event and recognizes the police officer as Paul, his friend's brother. Each section of the book captures one day—beginning the night Paul attacks Rashad, tracing the boys grappling with their roles in speaking out against police brutality, and ending with a protest both boys attend. As a whole, the book emphasizes the complex, insidious ways conscious and subconscious beliefs about race influence action, the necessity of using privilege to work toward change, and the potential power of teen voices.

In keeping with the ethos that "you can't heal what you don't reveal" (Emdin, 2018a), this healing narrative reveals how oppressive beliefs impact lives and are perpetuated through inaction and silence. Namely, *All American Boys* highlights the way racism is intertwined with assumptions, particularly stereotypes connected to the visual, by repeatedly addressing Rashad's appearance. Rashad's father, a former police officer, suggests Rashad's clothing is partially to blame for what happened, asking Rashad whether his pants were sagging. Rashad's brother distributes a photograph of Rashad in his ROTC uniform to the media as a way to share a more "respectable" image. Later, Rashad notes the difference in the comments posted on stories using various images of him. Comments posted under photographs of him in casual attire include "*Looks like he'd rob a store,*" while comments like "*If he were white with this uniform on, would you still question him?*" were posted under articles including Rashad's ROTC portrait (p. 278).

Quinn also reflects upon his own appearance in a direct connection to the book's title: "That was my role: the dutiful son, the All-American boy . . . Apparently, I had [my father's] eyes. His build. His 'All-American' looks. All-American? What the hell was that?" (pp. 27–28). This question offers opportunity for critical reflection. What *does* All-American mean? Who gets to be

All-American and who does not? Notably, the book's title does not include a hyphen, suggesting a reimagining of "All-American" that encompasses *all* American boys. Altogether, Quinn and Rashad's interrogative emphasis on the visual challenges readers to critically engage with what they see instead of avoiding discomfort through color-blind rhetoric.

The book furthers this discussion by explicitly naming racism as the foundation of these stereotypes. Quinn's narrative in particular engages with the need not just to see the wound but also to "identify its culprit" (Baker-Bell, Stanbrough et al., 2017, p. 139). Initially, Quinn is uncomfortable with Paul's actions but resists action of his own. When he speaks with Rashad's friend English, Quinn suggests that they "just forget it." English calls out the impossibility of that suggestion: "Forget my friend is in the hospital? . . . Man, there's no way I'm going to pretend it didn't happen" (Reynolds & Kiely, 2015, p. 174). He identifies Quinn's option to "just forget" as white privilege: "White boy like you can just walk away whenever you want. Everyone just sees you as Mr. All-American boy, and you can just keep on walking, thinking about other things" (p. 176). This conversation in which English connects Quinn's attempted response to his whiteness marks the beginning of a shift in Quinn's ideological position. The chapter concludes with a declaration from Quinn: "I didn't want to walk away anymore" (p. 185).

After *All American Boys* displays and names police brutality, revealing the wound, it provides possible responses, including the interconnected, transformative tools of art and activism. While in the hospital, Rashad uses art to reckon with his understanding of his attack and to consider his role in the resulting community action. The piece he creates draws upon the visual style of artist Aaron Douglas and the structure of Bil and Jeff Keane's *The Family Circus*, a well-known American comic strip which has run from 1961 to present. The resulting work—a hand punching through a teenager's chest while an onlooker cheers—combines and remixes these artistic influences into a new, personal piece. In doing so, Rashad illustrates the transformative power of remixing. He intertwines Douglas's culturally specific artistic heritage with the Keanes' palatable, "All-American" family comic, taking cues from other artists to understand his experience and remaking that art to speak to personal growth.

While Rashad's art is more private, his friend Carlos uses graffiti—an art form socio-historically connected with resistance (Rose, 1994)—to reach a broader audience. After visiting Rashad in the hospital, Carlos expresses a desire to do *something*. The result is a bold, unmissable tag outside of the school that becomes a rallying cry: "Rashad Is Absent Again Today" (p. 165). Copycat tags pop up around the city, and, later, the hashtag #RashadIsAbsentAgainToday sparks an online conversation connecting students from Rashad's school to the larger community and resulting in a planned protest.

In narrating protest as a tool for transformation, *All American Boys* anticipates potential questions, reactions, and debates readers may have. When the

protest is first mentioned, Rashad questions whether protests work, and both Rashad and Quinn encounter varying levels of discouragement from friends and family members. The authors devote significant space to refuting the idea that silence equates to neutrality. Quinn's friend Jill points him to Desmond Tutu's words: "IF YOU ARE NEUTRAL IN SITUATIONS OF INJUSTICE, YOU HAVE CHOSEN THE SIDE OF THE OPPRESSOR" (p. 290, *emphasis in original*), and Quinn concludes that he cannot only recognize his whiteness and the privilege that it affords him. If he does not actively speak out, he is a part of the problem. In his words, "Nothing was going to change unless we did something about it. *We!* White people! We had to stand up and say something about it too" (p. 292).

The book's final chapters connect Rashad's fictional story to the realities of the Black and Brown men and women who have been beaten or killed in similar scenarios. The protest, and the book, concludes with a die-in while the names of those murdered by the police (including Freddie Gray, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, and Tarika Wilson) are read. Each name is met by an echo that they are "absent again today" (p. 308), representing the final transformation of Carlos's tag from art into activism.

HEALING AND TRANSFORMING IN THE CLASSROOM

Quinn's recognition of the privilege extending from his whiteness and his acknowledgment of how he has bought into dangerous narratives about Blackness are powerful examples. As teachers, we often struggle with making internalized norms about race explicit as, by virtue of being "norms," they are so ingrained that they become difficult to acknowledge. To make those norms explicitly visible, we suggest taking a page from hip-hop and "flippin the script" (Smitherman, 1997, p. 17) by showing examples of worlds where those norms are remixed. Todrick Hall's (2018) music video "Ordinary Day" is set in an alternative world where some social norms are reversed: namely, queer Black individuals make up the dominant group. The video begins with a white boy walking in a 1950s-esque suburban neighborhood when a Black police officer approaches. After a brief encounter, he shoots the boy, holsters his gun, and waves cheerily to an approaching couple. He then leads the town in a chipper, choreographed song and dance, the boy's lifeless body remaining on the sidewalk the entire time.

In support of a pedagogy of healing, teachers can lead students in a multimodal critique of Hall's video that connects to Quinn's rhetorical question about being "All-American." The activity begins by asking students to brainstorm everything that comes to mind when they hear the phrase "All-American." Instead of having students share and explain, though, teachers are encouraged to have each student choose one word/phrase to add. Examples might include: athlete, proud, patriotic, melting pot, wealthy, values, suburban, and white people. This list should remain on the board as a touchstone during the analysis of Hall's video.

This critical analysis is conducted through layered and repeated steps that encourage engagement with the video's various modes—the visual, the verbal/linguistic, and the audio. Students will watch the video several times, taking structured notes about their observations. We suggest the following structure for students:

- **Seeing:** Watch the video without sound. Which visuals stand out? If we paused the video to discuss a single powerful scene, where would you recommend we freeze? Examples might include: the street name “Novyart” (or “Trayvon” backwards); the nostalgic 1950s style.
- **Silence:** During the second silent screening, focus on the act of watching the video without sound. How does the silent viewing affect your engagement with the visuals? Examples might include: the silence allows students to focus on what they see happening as opposed to the messages they hear; the silence as a metaphor for the silenced voices of the oppressed.
- **Sound:** Watch the video with sound and recognize how the effect of the added noises alters your viewing. Pay attention to the musical style, the beats, and the melody. What do these sounds make you think of? Examples might include: the song is reminiscent of a happy musical; the dominant noise is a light, tinkly beat suggesting innocence.
- **Speech:** During the final screening, pay attention to the lyrics. What are the singers saying? How do the lyrics connect to or change the experience of the visuals? Examples might include: the lyrics emphasize the town as a “safe little place for the boy next door”; inhabitants “learn to turn and look the other way.”

After each viewing, the teacher might record examples on the board to add to the growing understanding of how the music video emphasizes its messages and metaphors.

These multiple viewings allow students to see how Hall comments on the disturbing repetition of police brutality as part of an “ordinary day” in America. While the sight of this injustice is jarring, the music and lyrics suggest an acceptance and intentional embrace of the status quo. Because of the video's mid-century-Americana aesthetic and the song's lyrics about the “boy next door,” students can interrogate its flipped script of “All-Americaness.” Further, the video affirms that this interrogation is not isolated to the novel *All American Boys* but is, instead, fundamental to America.

We similarly suggest that teachers draw upon hip-hop pedagogies to unpack the book's representation of transformational activism. Hip-hop pedagogies celebrate texts that are “divergent, resistant, and emancipatory” (Hill, 2008, p. 138), and the novel's attention toward activism, emphasis on resistance,

and respect of graffiti and remixed art are all elements of hip-hop culture and pedagogies. While hip-hop's unapologetic nature can be intimidating to teachers unfamiliar with elements of the culture, rap's roots stem from African-American protest traditions and have always been a place of social and political critique (Rose, 1994). Thus, it is a natural tool to link schools, communities, artists, and activists. Teachers might bring in current resistance anthems such as Kendrick Lamar's "Alright" (Duckworth, Spears, & Williams, 2015) or Janelle Monae's "Hell You Talmbout" (Robinson et al., 2015), the latter of which uses the refrain of "say his/her name" in ways that echo the protest scene of *All American Boys*. However, we return to Todrick Hall and his (2016) song "Wrong Bitch," examining how he uses remix to critique police brutality, employing the metaphor of the Wicked Witch of the West from *The Wizard of Oz* (Leroy & Fleming, 1939).

In the video, Hall remixes and samples multiple versions of *The Wizard of Oz* as a way to implicitly and explicitly question those texts' values, particularly the witch's assumed criminality and irredeemable wickedness. He uses the "beats, rhyme, and critical mind" that are hip-hop's "built in mechanism for activism" (Emdin, 2018b), creating a model of and for resistance. "Wrong Bitch" draws readers' attention to the silencing of the witch's story and, through his remix, gives voice to her potential narrative. Like Reynolds and Kiely (2015), Hall highlights how appearance, specifically skin color, implies criminality. He implores his "beautiful green brothers and sisters" to "stand together as one" (Hall, 2016) and fight for equality and justice. Altogether, the video offers a model for how to speak truth to power through (re)creation.

Just as Hall remixes a classic narrative, we encourage teachers to invite students to create remixed resistance narratives. Popular stories like folk and fairy tales that feature flat, stereotypical antagonists may be particularly fruitful for this activity. Students could also follow Rashad's example by reinterpreting classic comics or sampling the styles of famous artists such as Kehinde Wiley and Amy Sutherland, the artists responsible for the Obamas' presidential portraits. When asking students to engage in this work, we suggest challenging students to incorporate lived experiences that speak to a broader, real-world audience, and, in turn, connecting their works to real-world audiences. Teachers might consider having students post or share their work more widely in digital or local communities.

TEACHERS, SIT DOWN. BE HUMBLE

Reading Reynolds and Kiely's novel alongside works such as Hall's videos invites conversation around contemporary social justice movements and creates a powerful connection to the roles music plays in activism and social justice (Love, 2017; Richardson, 2013; Rose, 1994). Additionally, these texts work toward "sustain[ing] the many practices and knowledges of communities of color that forward equity . . . and help youth, teachers and researchers expose

those practices that must be revised in the project of cultural justice” (Alim & Paris, 2017, p. 11). We also believe that discussions that tackle systemic violence fulfill Johnson’s pleas that “we, as educators, have to come to grips with state-sanctioned racial violence and understand that if the field of English education is complicit in racial violence, then we are further perpetuating racial disparities” (Baker-Bell, Butler et al., 2017, p. 126). In this way, in-school exploration of texts like these push against “a power that seeks to sustain itself above and beyond—and sometimes shot through—[Black and Brown] bodies” (Alim & Paris, 2017, p. 14).

Reynolds and Kiely’s fictional narrative reminds us of the role education plays in suppressing or sustaining activism. In the book, some teachers attempt to maintain “normalcy” by ignoring Rashad’s absence and others, like Quinn’s coach, threaten punishment for participating in the upcoming demonstration. Other teachers actively engage in difficult and necessary conversations, using class time and curriculum to discuss Rashad and police brutality and offering space for students to meet and talk. Some teachers silence students as acts of control and rigidity; others practice vulnerability, expressing frustration with the administration and uncertainty about what to do. These teachers do not claim to be experts, and they do not follow school rules blindly. By both implicitly and explicitly critiquing the school’s response to Rashad’s absence, these teachers stand alongside their students.

CREE and hip-hop education seek to disrupt oppressive school practices that have become the status quo, both through acknowledging students’ lives and incorporating their voices and cultures into the curriculum. In order to bring these texts and activities into the classroom in a way that is healing rather than damaging, teachers ought to follow Baker-Bell, Butler et al.’s (2017) suggestions:

1. Engage in critical self-reflection, specifically working through the ways their own positionalities influence their pedagogical practices and the ways they perceive Black and Brown youth.
2. (Re)imagine ELA classrooms as sites for healing and racial justice.
3. Engage all youth in concentrated and serious dialogues about how white supremacy, anti-blackness, anti-brownness, homophobia, and other forms of xenophobia lead to race-based violence.

(p. 125)

At the same time, teachers must actively decenter themselves. We acknowledge that this decentering can lead to moments of discomfort, uncertainty, and vulnerability. Garcia and O’Donnell-Allen (2015) refer to this experience as “wobbling” and argue that “adopting a pose of culturally proactive teaching requires humility and an innate willingness to accept *wobbling*” (p. 19). We believe that in order to effectively work toward change we, as teachers, must also be vulnerable, and, perhaps more important, for student voices to be heard, we must be humble.

SEE ALSO

Medina, T., Jennings, J., & Robinson, S. (2017). *I am Alfonso Jones*. New York, NY: Lee & Low.

Alfonso is murdered by a police officer who mistakes a hanger he is holding for a gun. This graphic novel follows both Alfonso's journey on a ghost train where he meets other victims of police violence and the community rallying around his death in the fight for justice. We see the visual text as particularly fruitful for inviting comparisons to other resistance narratives, both those that highlight instances of anti-Blackness and those that celebrate often-overlooked elements of Black cultures.

Rhodes, J.P. (2018). *Ghost boys*. New York, NY: Little, Brown.

In this middle-grade novel, the story alternates between the past, recounting the life of Jerome, who is killed by a police officer, and the present, wherein Jerome meets the ghosts of other boys who have been victims of racial violence, including Emmett Till. Teachers might bring in the real stories of these "ghost boys" and ask students to imagine written conversations or artistic representations that engage with the perspectives of those young people.

Stone, N. (2017). *Dear Martin*. New York, NY: Ember.

Protagonist Justyce composes letters to Martin Luther King, Jr., in order to process his multiple experiences with police violence and institutionalized racism. Just as Justyce turns to Dr. King's words to process his life, teachers may ask students to read King's "What Is Your Life's Blueprint?" (King, 1967) and to design their own life's blueprint. *Dear Martin* would pair well with Reynolds and Kiely's book: Teachers could ask students to imagine conversations between characters (e.g., Quinn and Jared) and consider what they might share with one another.

Thomas, A. (2017). *The hate u give*. New York, NY: Balzer + Bray.

After witnessing her friend Khalil's death, Starr has to decide whether to speak up about what she saw and risk disrupting her life or stay silent but dishonor her friend. We suggest creating space for students to unpack the intertextuality present within Thomas's book by pairing it with songs Thomas compiled that influenced her writing (<http://angiethomas.com/2016/06/the-hate-u-give-writing-playlist>) or with other hip-hop songs such as those mentioned in this chapter.

Watson, R. (2017). *Piecing me together*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury.

Jade initially views the mentorship program that she is offered by her predominantly white private school as patronizing; however, she uses the program to connect with Black women in her community, working to speak against injustice using her art as activism. Inspired by the book's focus on art, teachers might ask students to create a collaged response to the novel, emulating Jade's art in the book. Students might also look at how Black artists, including those discussed in this chapter, have used art to heal and to resist.

REFERENCES

- Alim, H. S., & Paris, D. (2017). What is culturally sustaining pedagogy and why does it matter? In D. Paris & H. S. Alim (Eds.), *Culturally sustaining pedagogies: Teaching and learning for justice in a changing world* (pp. 1–23). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Baker-Bell, A., Butler, T., & Johnson, L. (2017). The pain and the wounds: A call for critical race English education in the wake of racial violence. *English Education*, 49(2), 116–129.
- Baker-Bell, A., Stanbrough, R. J., & Everett, S. (2017). The stories they tell: Mainstream media, pedagogies of healing, and critical media literacy. *English Education*, 49(2), 130–152.
- DiAngelo, R. (2011). White fragility. *The International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, 3(3), 54–70.
- Duckworth, K., Spears, S., & Williams, P. (2015). Alright [Recorded by Kendrick Lamar]. On *To pimp a butterfly* [Digital download]. Los Angeles, CA: Top Dawg Entertainment.
- Emdin, C. (2018a, April 13) *Hip hop ed and teacher education*. Keynote presented at the launch of the Center for Innovation in Teacher Education and Development, New York, NY.
- Emdin, C. (2018b). Introduction. In C. Emdin & E. Adjapong (Eds.), *#HipHopEd: The compilation on hip-hop education: Volume 1: Hip-hop as education, philosophy, and practice* (pp. 1–11). Boston, MA: Brill.
- Garcia, A., & O'Donnell-Allen, C. (2015). *Pose, wobble, flow: A culturally proactive approach to literacy instruction*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Hall, T. (2016, July 1). *Wrong bitch (feat. Bob the Drag Queen) by Todrick Hall*. Retrieved from www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Bj4YEte6T8.
- Hall, T. (2018, March 14). *Ordinary day by Todrick Hall*. Retrieved from www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Bj4YEte6T8.
- Hill, M. L. (2008). Toward a pedagogy of the popular: Bourdieu, hip-hop, and out-of-school literacies. In J. Albright & A. Luke (Eds.), *Pierre Bourdieu and literacy education* (pp. 136–161). New York, NY: Routledge.
- King, M. L., Jr. (2013). What is your life's blueprint? In W. D. Myers (Ed.), *A time to break silence: The essential works of Martin Luther King, Jr., for students* (Vol. 10). Boston, MA: Beacon Press. (Original work published in 1967)
- Leroy, M. (Producer), & Fleming, V. (Director). (1939). *The wizard of Oz* [Motion picture]. Santa Monica, CA: MGM.
- Love, B. L. (2017). A ratchet lens: Black queer youth, agency, hip hop, and the Black ratchet imagination. *Educational Researcher*, 46(9), 539–547.
- Reynolds, J., & Kiely, B. (2015). *All American boys*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Richardson, E. (2013). Developing critical hip hop feminist literacies: Centrality and subversion of sexuality in the lives of Black girls. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 46(3), 327–341.
- Robinson, J., Wonder, N., Joseph, C., II., Mobisson, J., GianArthur, R., Belle, A., . . . & George 2.0. (2015). Hell you Talmbout [Recorded by Janelle Monáe]. On *Hell You Talmbout* [Digital download]. Atlanta, GA: Wondaland Records.

- Rose, T. (1994). "All aboard the night train": Flow, layering, and rupture in postindustrial New York. In *Black noise: Rap music and Black culture in contemporary America* (pp. 21–63). Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Smitherman, G. (1997). "The chain remain the same": Communicative practices in the hip hop nation. *Journal of Black Studies*, 28(1), 3–25.

Critical Language Awareness

Unpacking Linguistic and Racial Ideologies in *The Hate U Give*

Christina Marie Ashwin and Sara Studebaker

This chapter is co-authored by a teacher educator and a secondary English language arts (ELA) teacher practitioner who want to provide secondary teachers with critical theory and pedagogical strategies to guide instruction regarding racism in various forms in the United States today through Angie Thomas's young adult novel *The Hate U Give*. Specifically, we propose Critical Language Pedagogies (CLP) (Godley & Minnici, 2008) to inform teaching about linguistic discrimination from a Critical Language Awareness (CLA) (Clark, Fairclough, Ivanic, and Martin-Jones, 1990) approach to teaching. In addition, we draw upon critical patriotism (King, Warren, Bender, & Finley, 2016) as a frame for teaching about political movements aimed at mitigating the effects of racism in the United States today, for example, #blacklivesmatter.

SUSTAINED RACISM IN US CLASSROOMS

Even though United States K–12 classrooms today are becoming more racially, linguistically, and culturally diverse, teacher populations and preparation programs (e.g., curriculum, content, and resources) have remained white (NCES, 2013, 2016; Sleeter, 2016). In addition, studies have shown that white teachers may perpetuate problematic understandings of racism, such as committing to a color-blind, “I don’t see race” approach to teaching (Stoll, 2014). Likewise, white teachers may avoid talk of race and racism altogether due to uncertainty about how to talk about racism (Bailey & Katradis, 2016). Moreover, research has also documented how some white teachers may avoid teaching about racism because they outright reject the notion of white privilege and sustained racial discrimination in the United States today (Picower, 2009; Solomana, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2006). Furthermore, research has also shown that some white teachers may hold implicit deficit views about students of color and their families. These deficit views have been linked to

lowered expectations and unequal outcomes for students of color when compared to their white peers (Garza & Garza, 2010; Pollack, 2012).

LINGUISTIC DISCRIMINATION AS A FORM OF RACISM

One specific way in which white teachers may maintain racialized discrimination against their students of color is through upholding the dominant yet problematic assumption that *standardized English* (SE) (commonly referred to as mainstream English or standard English) is more communicative, grammatical, and correct than other *nonstandard* dialects (language usage different than SE, e.g., using the Pittsburghese term “yinz” instead of “you guys”) or *vernacular dialects*, which refer to highly stigmatized dialects, such as African American Vernacular English (AAVE) (Blake & Cutler, 2003; Godley & Minnici, 2008). This problematic, yet pervasive, assumption is referred to as *standard language ideology* (SLI) (Lippi-Green, 1999; Milroy & Milroy, 1985). Discrimination based on how someone speaks can be referred to as *linguistic discrimination*, and it has been linked to negative outcomes for nonstandard and vernacular-speaking students who are often students of color (Dyson & Smitherman, 2009).

Linguistic discrimination has also been linked to the maintenance of *racism* in the United States today (Bacon, 2017). In this chapter, we define racism through the explicit and implicit white dominance of the economy, ideas, and spaces, which is also referred to as *white supremacy* (Harris, 1993; Picower, 2009; Yoon, 2012). Similar to research which has documented white privilege in the United States today (McIntosh, 1990; Yoon, 2012), research has demonstrated that white teachers who linguistically discriminate against their students may privilege SE and further stigmatize dialects spoken by students of color and their families (Dyson & Smitherman, 2009; Godley, Carpenter, & Werner, 2007). Therefore, when teachers linguistically discriminate against students of color, by subscribing to the SLI, they are participating in a systemic and harmful form of racism.

In summary, it is essential for white teachers not only to be aware of how racism might negatively impact their teaching, but teachers must also have access to critical pedagogies to mitigate sustained racism in their classrooms.

CRITICAL LANGUAGE AWARENESS

Critical Language Awareness (CLA) is an approach to studying language which prompts teachers and students to study how power structures (racism, classism, sexism, etc.) are reinforced through language (Godley & Minnici, 2008). Clark et al. argued that from a CLA approach, “the main objective of schooling ought to be: developing critical awareness of the world, and of the possibilities for changing it” (1990, p. 250). By thinking about schooling through the CLA lens, teachers are tasked with not only addressing inequities caused by racism, or another system of oppression, but are also guided to

Critical Language Awareness

A teaching approach which prompts teachers and students to consider:

1. how power structures (racism, classism, sexism, etc.) are reinforced through language, and
2. how to disrupt inequities caused by systemic discrimination.

■ **FIGURE 14.1** What is Critical Language Awareness? (Clark, et al.,1990)

Critical Language Pedagogies

CLP are instructional strategies that:

1. stress that all dialects are equally grammatical, correct, and follow their own patterns;
2. guide students to identify, label, and problematize dominant (yet erroneous) beliefs about language;
3. frame the study language as a dialogue between students and teachers; and
4. include lessons which incorporate the language usage and understandings of your specific students.

■ **FIGURE 14.2** What are Critical Language Pedagogies? (Godley & Minnici, 2008)

prompt their students to think about how they can change their world for the better to mitigate the effects of these inequities.

Godley and Minnici (2008) developed Critical Language Pedagogies (CLP). CLP are instructional strategies for educators who are interested in unpacking racialized linguistic discrimination in their classrooms. Godley and Minnici proposed specific CLP or “instructional approaches that guide students to critical examinations of the ideologies surrounding language and dialects, the power relations such ideologies uphold, and ways to change these ideologies” (p. 320). Examples of learning goals informed by CLP include teaching students that all dialects are equally grammatical, are equally correct, and have their own patterns. Moreover, educators who utilize CLP guide their students to identify, label, and problematize dominant (yet erroneous) beliefs about language. Teachers informed by a CLP approach frame the study

of language with their students as a dialogue between teacher and students. Godley and Minnici explained that CLP “requires a classroom environment that is itself democratic—where students’ viewpoints are highlighted through discussion and debate, differences are celebrated rather than squelched, and no single understanding of language is presented as ‘the truth’” (p. 323). And lastly, teachers who utilize CLP are urged to incorporate both the language usage of their students and their understandings of language. Teachers who want to critically engage in discussions of language with their students should consider all dialects (SE, nonstandard, and vernacular) used by their students and utilize this information when designing and executing lessons on language.

TEACHING ABOUT RACISM

In the United States today, the persistent trauma caused by racialized discrimination is often documented through video and widely shared through social media. Sadly, the loss of black American lives has too often become the topic of popular discourse. Teachers and their students may be unsure of how to approach these emotionally fraught events, the sharing of these traumatic incidents on social media, and the political and social justice movements surrounding them, for example, #blacklivesmatter and #takeaknee. As follows, teachers may be unsure of how to approach teaching about modern political movements which call attention to the traumatic effects of sustained racism in the United States today (Beck, 2013; Dabach, 2015; King et al., 2016).

We rely on King et al.’s (2016) *critical patriotism*, or a specific view of patriotism which calls specific attention to highlighting and rectifying social injustices in the United States. King et al. shared that unlike patriotism, critical patriotism:

resists what we normally locate as patriotic behavior, blind loyalty, staunch allegiance, and inflexible attachment to the country; instead, patriotism, in this manner, is about critiquing discriminatory systems and critical discourse and holding the country accountable to its egalitarian ideas.

(p. 96)

King et al. proposed critical patriotism as a lens for teachers to study popular political movements aimed at mitigating racism. King et al. described #blacklivesmatter as a political movement created to advocate “for the humanity of Black people and desires to transform society through disruption.” Critical patriotism challenges the citizens of the United States to consider the ideals of color-blindness, meritocracy (working hard to get ahead), and equality on which the country was founded (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). By labeling political movements, such as #blacklivesmatter, as forms of critical patriotism, such

movements can be viewed as calling attention to the need for US citizens to work to improve our democracy.

ADDRESSING CHALLENGES TO IMPLEMENTING CLP AND TEACHING CRITICAL PATRIOTISM IN CLASSROOMS

Educators may face both external and internal challenges to implementing critical strategies like CLP or critical patriotism in their classrooms. Critical educators may be confronted with students, parents, colleagues, and/or administrators who are uncomfortable discussing political topics, such as linguistic discrimination or racism, in classrooms. Another challenge to implementing critical approaches might be hesitancy amongst some teachers to engage in critical discussions of racism and its consequences (Picower, 2009; Yoon, 2012). However, as critical educators who want to engage in anti-racist work, it is imperative for all teachers to engage in discussions of racism and its consequences with their students. We hope that the theory and definitions of key terms for describing racism and its relationship to language ideologies provided in the framing of this chapter will provide teachers with the language to engage in these discussions.

Too often a focus on social justice, mitigating inequities caused by racial, gender, or other systems of discrimination, is presented as supplemental or “in addition” to other curricular goals (Banks, 1996). We believe that to effectively teach students about racism, critical educators must make social justice a cornerstone of their practice as teachers. In other words, critical educators should explore opportunities for teaching about language ideologies, linguistic discrimination, and other forms of systemic discrimination throughout their lessons and curriculum planning.

Too often curricula or instructional strategies that promote social justice are aimed at teachers and students in racially and otherwise diverse schools and not in majority white or homogenous schools. We argue that students of all racial backgrounds should discuss racism and other forms of injustice in their classrooms (Swalwell, 2013). White students need exposure to pedagogies and learning goals which call attention to their racial and linguistic privileges.

Perhaps by sharing the critical pedagogies and approaches described in this chapter with colleagues or administrators who are resistant to discussions of social justice or racism, teachers can convince them that social justice education is for everyone and should be part of every lesson.

FEATURES OF THE YOUNG ADULT FOCAL TEXT: *THE HATE U GIVE*

Angie Thomas’s young adult novel, *The Hate U Give*, provides teachers with opportunities to address racial and linguistic discrimination in the United States today.

Starr's Two Worlds

Thomas's teenage protagonist Starr Carter navigates life between two worlds: one white and one black. Thomas places her protagonist Starr, a young black woman, in an elite private school (Williamson) with almost all white peers. Outside of school, Starr lives with her family in their geographically distinct black neighborhood (Garden Heights). And although Thomas describes Starr's family as holding an esteemed role in her black community, Starr is aware of how she might be perceived by her white peers at her white school as inferior. Accordingly, Thomas shares Starr's inner monologue regarding how she consciously accommodates her speech, language, dress, and actions to suit these two worlds. By placing Starr between these two worlds, Thomas has designed Starr as a character who provides insights and personal experiences for students who experience racialized discrimination and those who may knowingly or unknowingly perpetuate this discrimination.

The Death of Khalil

After Starr witnesses the murder of her peer Khalil at the hands of a white police officer, Starr's life experiences with racism, prejudice, and injustice take center stage in both her personal life and in the news media. Thomas's work consciously calls to mind the tragic murders of too many young, unarmed, black Americans including Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Sandra Bland, Philando Castile, and far too many others who have died due to the pernicious impact of sustained and unchecked racism in the United States today. By sharing a fictional example of the killing of an innocent black youth by a white police officer, Thomas provides teachers with an opportunity to discuss the purpose and need for political movements like #blacklivesmatter, #takeaknee, or #sayhername.

PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES FOR STUDYING LANGUAGE AND RACISM IN *THE HATE U GIVE*

Working Dictionary

In a first activity, teachers and students might work together to identify terms related to linguistic discrimination and racism in both the novel *The Hate U Give* and in their own lives. The teacher and students co-create a working "dictionary" of terms related to linguistic discrimination and race/racism that include a functional denotative definition of each term, along with connotations, illustrative interpretations, and examples from *The Hate U Give*. They also include supplemental nonfiction texts and personal experiences of students. Teachers are urged to use the terms in italics from this chapter to guide this activity.

Exploration of Dual Identities

In the next activity, teachers might guide students to unpack Starr's dual identities through her language choices. Teachers are also urged to use the suggested discussion questions to prompt students to discuss their own experiences with language and identity. Students would be instructed to focus on finding examples in the text of Starr's control of her dialect usage, paying careful attention to moments when Starr uses a dialect other than SE and when she decides to use SE. For example, students could create two columns on a sheet of paper, labeling one column "Starr" and the other column "Williamson Starr" (which Starr names herself in reference to the exclusive, nearly all-white preparatory school). Students could also take notes about the way that Starr signals that she shifts between distinct selves through the language choices she makes, and also the internal conflict she feels, if any, about using SE.

Teacher Prompts for Discussion/Writing Reflection:

1. What influences Starr's decision to change her dialect usage?
2. Which is Starr's "true" identity, "Starr" or "Williamson Starr"?
3. Is possible to have more than one "true" linguistic identity?
4. When does Starr combine her linguistic identities? Why does she do this? Is this hybrid linguistic identity Starr's "true" linguistic identity?

Fieldwork Investigation

In a third activity, teachers might ask students to explore more deeply their own language usage and that of their peers. Teachers are urged to ask their students to consider how themes of race, class, and gender impact the language choices of the students in their classroom and to compare how their experiences relate to that of Starr.

Students complete a two-week-long fieldwork investigation of the multiple identities that they shift between in their own lives. In this investigation, they explore how shifting identities are signaled by making choices about how they speak and/or pressures to change how they speak. Students might begin by identifying their distinct identities and naming them. For example, a student might identify a variety of identities including "Family Malik," "Jock Malik," "Classroom Malik," and "Customer Service Malik." Students might then work independently to construct a fieldwork journal to document their different linguistic identities. The project might culminate in a gallery walk, where students construct a visual display for each of their identities. Students could travel the gallery walk in shifts so that each student takes a turn as a docent and as a gallery visitor. As students travel the gallery walk, they could write notes on a graphic organizer

that prompts them to notice patterns between their own and their peers' language usage.

Teacher Prompts for Discussion/Writing Reflection:

1. Which identities feel more authentic, and which take more effort to shift into?
2. What external factors (people, places, etc.) do you notice when you change your dialect usage?
3. What themes do you notice in your own language usage?
4. What themes do you notice between students' language usage in our classroom? For example, do certain students remain in one dialect more than another? Are most dialect or SE speakers?
5. Do some students report speaking only in SE? If so, how might their experiences differ from students who switch between dialects in our class? How is their experience different from Starr's?
6. What themes emerge regarding race, class, and/or gender and language usage amongst your classmates?

Critical Exploration of Media

In this activity, students are asked to consider how the media covered the shooting of Michael Brown. Students consider how the media use language to engage in or avoid discussions of racism.

Students participate in a discussion that deconstructs media coverage of the Michael Brown shooting to evaluate the role that linguistic profiling might play in influencing public opinion. In this activity, students can be divided into groups of three, and each group is assigned a piece of media to analyze. Some groups might be given traditional print media, while others might review live news coverage, and others still might explore social media commentary. Media samples would be sourced from both liberal and conservative news outlets, as well as the grassroots, social activist coverage that has been enabled through social media platforms and has been instrumental in the proliferation of movements, such as #blacklivesmatter. On an 8.5 × 11 piece of paper, students might write key phrases the media sources use. They might conduct a discussion about the racial bias that the language conveys about the police shooting, which will help draw conclusions about how each piece of media reports on racism. After the completion of the research, discussion could begin in a "snowball" fashion. Students could be instructed to find another pair that analyzed media which use similar language to the resources they were assigned. Each pair would have a few minutes to chat about the similarities discovered in their media report before finding another pair. Student pairs could continue to chat and mix until all groups have talked. The teacher might then ask the students to split into two large groups: those groups with media reported about the shooting as an act of racialized discrimination and those groups

with media reported about the shooting as accidental/unavoidable. Students from each group would display their 8.5 x 11 sheets of paper on either side of the room and then physically switch places with the other large group so that students would then have time to silently examine the language identified by their peers.

Teacher Prompts for Discussion/Writing Reflection:

1. What themes emerged in the reporting of the murder?
2. How might language influence public opinion/create divisiveness on the topic?

Examinations of Critical Patriotism

In this final activity, students would be prompted to define critical patriotism and consider how modern and historical social justice movements might serve as examples of critical patriotism.

First, the students and teacher might co-construct a definition of critical patriotism using the definition provided in this chapter. Students might then be divided into groups and allowed to select from a list of relevant social justice movements that are both historical and present-day. Some possible examples include #blacklivesmatter and the Black Panther movement, which were both referenced in *The Hate U Give*, but could also extend to other movements, such as gay rights, #metoo, disability rights, Occupy Wall Street, Dakota Access Pipeline protests, etc.

Teacher Prompts for Discussion/Writing Reflection:

1. How and why did the movement begin? What did it aim to accomplish?
2. How was it perceived and/or covered by mainstream media?
3. How might this movement qualify as an example of critical patriotism?
4. What connections can be drawn between this movement and the work of Just Us for Justice in *The Hate U Give*?

SEE ALSO

Magoon, Keka. (2014) *How it went down*. New York, NY: Henry Holt.

Keka Magoon introduces readers to the voices of Tariq Johnson's friends and family as they cope with his murder. Magoon's text focuses on youth and community members who often utilize nonstandard dialects to express how the death of Tariq has impacted their lives. This text may provide opportunities for teachers to explore issues of race, dialect, and social justice that impact youth of color in the United States today.

REFERENCES

- Bacon, C. (2017). Dichotomies, dialects, and deficits: Confronting the “Standard English” myth in literacy and teacher education. *Literacy Research: Theory, Method, and Practice*, 66(1), 341–357.
- Bailey, S., & Katradis, M. (2016). “Pretty much fear!!” Rationalizing teacher (dis) engagement in social justice education. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 49(2), 215–227.
- Banks, J. A. (1996). *Multicultural education, transformative knowledge, and action: Historical and contemporary perspectives*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Beck, T. (2013). Identity, discourse, and safety in a high school discussion of same-sex marriage. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 41(4), 1–32.
- Blake, R., & Cutler, C. (2003). AAE and variation in teachers’ attitudes: A question of school philosophy? *Linguistics and Education*, 14(2), 163–194.
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2010). *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in the United States*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Clark, R., Fairclough, N., Ivanic, R., & Martin-Jones, M. (1990). Critical language awareness, part 1: A critical review of three current approaches to language awareness. *Language and Education*, 4(4), 249–260.
- Dabach, D. B. (2015). “My student was apprehended by immigration”: A civics teacher’s breach of silence in a mixed citizenship classroom. *Harvard Educational Review*, 85(3), 383–412.
- Dyson, A. H., & Smitherman, G. (2009). The right (write) start: African American language and the discourse of sounding right. *Teachers College Record*, 111(4), 973–998.
- Garza, R. E., & Garza, E. (2010). Successful white female teachers of Mexican American students of low socioeconomic status. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 9(3), 189–206.
- Godley, A., Carpenter, B., & Werner, C. (2007). “I’ll speak in proper slang”: Language ideologies in daily editing activity. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 42(1), 100–131.
- Godley, A., & Minnici, A. (2008). Critical language pedagogy in an urban high school English class. *Urban Education*, 43(3), 319–346.
- Harris, C. I. (1993). Whiteness as property. *Harvard law review*, 106(8), 1707–1791.
- King, L. J., Warren, C. A., Bender, M., & Finley, S. Y. (2016). #Black lives matter as critical patriotism. In W. Journell (Ed.), *Teaching social studies in an era of divisiveness: The challenges of discussing social issues in a non-partisan way*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Lippi-Green, R. (1999). *English with an accent: Language, ideology, and discrimination in the United States*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- McIntosh, P. (1990). White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack. *Independent School*, 49, 31–36.
- Milroy, J., & Milroy, L. (1985). *Authority in language: Investigating language prescription and standardisation*. London: Routledge.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2013). *Number and percentage distribution of teachers in public and private elementary and secondary schools, by selected characteristics: Selected years, 1987–88 through 2011–12*. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13_209.10.asp.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2016). *The condition of education—Participation in education elementary/secondary—Racial/ethnic enrollment in public schools*. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cge.asp.

- Picower, B. (2009). The unexamined whiteness of teaching: How white teachers maintain and enact dominant racial ideologies. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 12(2), 197–215.
- Pollack, T. M. (2012). The miseducation of a beginning teacher: One educator's critical reflections on the functions and power of deficit narratives. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 14(2), 93–98.
- Sleeter, C. (2016). Wrestling with problematics of whiteness in teacher education. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 29(8), 1065–1068.
- Solomana, R. P., Portelli, J. P., Daniel, B. J., & Campbell, A. (2006). The discourse of denial: How white teacher candidates construct racism and 'white privilege'. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(2), 147–169.
- Stoll, L. C. (2014). Constructing the color-blind classroom: Teachers' perspectives on race and schooling. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 17(5), 688–705.
- Swalwell, K. (2013). "With great power comes great responsibility": Privileged students' conceptions of social justice-oriented citizenship. *Democracy & Education*, 21(1), 1–11.
- Thomas, A. (2017). *The hate u give*. New York, NY: Balzer + Bray.
- Yoon, I. H. (2012). The paradoxical nature of whiteness-at-work in the daily life of schools and teacher communities. *Race, Ethnicity, and Education*, 15(5), 587–613.

Critical Comparative Content Analysis

Examining Violence, Politics, and Culture in Two Versions of *I Am Malala*

Amanda Haertling Thein, Mark A. Sulzer,
and Renita R. Schmidt

Canonical texts, written primarily by and about white men, have topped the list of books most frequently taught in US high schools for decades (Applebee, 1993; Stallworth, Gibbons, & Fauber, 2006). However, young adult literature (YAL)—and multicultural young adult literature (MCYAL) in particular—is making its way into high school English classrooms.

This shift toward MCYAL in the English classroom holds tremendous promise. But teaching MCYAL isn't as easy as ordering new books and teaching as we always have. YAL, while accessible, engaging, and complex, is always written by adults for the lucrative YAL market. The authors, editors, and literary agents who shape and produce YAL are always imagining what youth—and those who buy books for them—will want in the literature they read. As we've argued elsewhere, "It is not surprising, then, that YAL sometimes supports dominant ideologies and discourses about adolescence found within society at large" (Thein & Sulzer, 2015, p. 47). In an effort to appeal to the youth market, YAL sometimes makes problematic assumptions about who youth are and what they care about, drawing on prototypical white, middle-class narratives about growing up. Assumptions about youth (e.g., that all youth are rebellious and driven by hormones) are worthy of critique (Lesko, 2012), especially given that these assumptions disproportionately impact minoritized youth (Groenke et al., 2015).

MCYAL needs a critical approach that helps students consider how culture, race, class, gender, and power are represented through youth characters in literature written expressly for a youth audience.

In this chapter, we offer one such approach that we call *Critical Comparative Content Analysis* (Sulzer, Thein, & Schmidt, 2018). Below, we outline our approach, then illustrate how it can be used to help students critically examine the YAL adaptation of Malala Yousafzai's memoir.

I AM MALALA: ONE MEMOIR, TWO VERSIONS

Malala Yousafzai's memoir, *I Am Malala* (2013), is the story of a 15-year-old girl's experiences growing up in Pakistan under the Taliban; standing up for the right of girls to be educated; being shot by the Taliban; and becoming an international advocate for peace and education. Written by Yousafzai with Christina Lamb, *I Am Malala* became a national bestseller and was awarded a British National Book Award. Yousafzai is the youngest ever recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize.

Although *I Am Malala* describes the experiences of a teenager and is written at a sixth- to seventh-grade reading level, the memoir was adapted for the youth market in 2014. The adaptation was again written by Yousafzai, this time with Patricia McCormick. At 196 pages, this book is about 100 pages shorter than the original and is at a slightly lower, fifth- to sixth-grade reading level.

This memoir pair is representative of a contemporary trend—the publication of general market memoirs alongside quickly re-published YAL adaptations. Typically, these adaptations provide first-person accounts of people rising above adversity to achieve great success. In recent years, memoir pairs about Misty Copeland, Wes Moore, and Hope Solo, for instance, have been published. Although stories of individual successes of well-known people hold intrinsic appeal, our own research into several of these memoir pairs suggests that they should be approached with critical attention (Sulzer et al., 2018; Thein et al., 2013).

In one study, we analyzed the original and YAL adaptation of Wes Moore's memoir (2010, 2012) of his experiences growing up as an African American boy in a violent Baltimore neighborhood, then finding success as a Rhodes Scholar, a decorated veteran, a White House fellow, and a business leader (Thein et al., 2013). We found that the original version of the memoir offered readers opportunities to consider the unique combination of personal ambition, institutional and family support networks, and luck needed to succeed in the face of systemic racism and oppression. In comparison, we found that the YAL adaptation took a didactic tone with readers, focusing on lessons about individual persistence and good decision-making. We concluded that the YAL adaptation "implies that considerations of institutional oppression and privilege are not appropriate for young adults" (p. 57). Following this study, we wanted to develop a critical method to analyze and critique the positioning of youth and youth readers in YAL.

WHAT IS CRITICAL COMPARATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS (CCCA)?

CCCA illuminates differences between two or more texts. As a research process, we've described CCCA as a series of interlocking and recursive steps that emphasize building interpretations about *the differences between texts* rather than about a given text in isolation (Sulzer et al., 2018). An analysis of textual

differences must consider a property of language we call *at-ness*—the idea that language is directed *at* someone—an “implied reader” or implied audience (Iser, 1978). The author(s) (we mean “author” to include editors, ghostwriters, and marketing/publishing teams) must anticipate what the implied reader will respond to. When a given text is directed *at* a general market audience and then adapted for and directed *at* a youth audience, CCCA offers a process for critical consideration of this *at-ness* quality of the language.

Students might recognize similarities between *at-ness* and rhetorical appeals. And in some ways, doing CCCA might feel like doing a rhetorical analysis of a series of, for example, print ads or TV commercials. The idea that a presentation is crafted to elicit a response from a particular audience is a great starting point for CCCA. CCCA parts ways with rhetorical analysis in its emphasis on the differences between texts. Whereas rhetorical analysis might ask the question, *What logos, ethos, and pathos appeals are being used in this text and why?*, CCCA asks the question, *Why is this audience being talked to in this way, and why is that audience being talked to in that way?*

For the purposes of this chapter, CCCA can be distilled into three questions:

- **What are the differences between texts?** CCCA starts with putting texts side-by-side and noticing what is different, much like a “Spot the Difference” game where two almost identical photos are presented and the goal is to notice differences. For two texts, differences could involve added or omitted words, scenes, or even organizational features (e.g., a glossary) that might appear in one text and not another.
- **What do we see when we look across the differences?** Differences between texts are rarely random but rather have some underlying pattern. For youth adaptations, the pattern will likely emerge as a change in tone or message or style in the adapted text.
- **What do the differences mean?** CCCA approaches differences with a sense of criticality. With texts adapted for youth, we might explore how the *at-ness* of language toward youth reveals how young people are perceived as readers/thinkers: what they are imagined to need from a text and what is perceived as off limits.

USING CCCA TO ANALYZE *I AM MALALA*

For most teachers, asking students to read both versions of *I Am Malala* won’t be practical in terms of time or resources. The CCCA activities we describe don’t require a comprehensive reading of both texts. Instead, they ask students to look closely at key aspects of each text. Teachers might break students into groups to work through a CCCA of the texts. Each group might work with one copy of each of the two memoirs, so that buying an entire class set of both memoirs is not necessary. The CCCA we’ll describe might be undertaken by students prior to a unit on the YAL version of the memoir. Participating in a CCCA of the general market and YAL versions of a given memoir will prepare

students to read the entirety of the YAL version of the memoir with a well-informed critical stance.

WARM-UP: EXAMINING DIFFERENCES IN PERITEXTUAL FEATURES

A good place to start with CCCA is the peritextual features of the books. Students can compare the books by looking for differences and similarities in covers, illustrations, endpapers, photography, notes, dedications, and copyright pages. Comparing these surface-level features of the two texts can illuminate key distinctions that pique students' interests in studying textual differences.

In examining the peritextual features in the two versions of *I Am Malala*, students may first notice similarities. The two versions use the same color palette of turquoise, fuchsia, yellow, and white and feature a photo of Malala on the cover. Both proclaim that Malala is a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize and that the book is a bestseller. And both books have the same title. One of the first differences students may notice, however, is the variance in subtitles. The subtitle of the general market memoir is *The Girl Who Stood up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban*, while the subtitle of the YAL version is *How One Girl Stood up for Education and Changed the World*. While both versions emphasize Malala's efforts toward educational equity, the YAL version emphasizes the positive idea that Malala has "changed the world," removing the reference to the fact that she was shot by the Taliban. Noticing this change in subtitle, students might pose questions about how these titles position Malala differently—as someone who took action in the YAL version and as someone who was acted upon in the general market version. They might also pose questions about what this change in subtitle suggests about their positioning as readers—the *at-ness* of the texts. Do authors and publishers believe youth will be drawn more to positive stories? Less violent stories? Do they believe that adults who purchase books for youth will avoid books that make mention of politics and violent extremism?

Similar questions may arise as students examine the photography within the text. Although the two versions include a similar number of photos and there is significant replication of photos across versions, differences in the photos that are uniquely included in each version are noteworthy. For instance, students may discern that the general market version includes a close-up of the bloody bench where Malala was shot as well as a photo of physicians working on an unconscious Malala, while the YAL version eliminates this photo and swaps a photo of the bus where Malala was shot for the photo of the bloody bench. Students might also notice that the YAL version includes more photos of prototypical childhood events (e.g., her brother's birthday party) and school events, while the general market version includes more photos of extended family, prayer, and Malala's participation in United Nations events. Examining the photos included in each text might lead students to continued questions

about the positioning of Malala. Why is Malala's work for the United Nations emphasized in the general market text, while her success in schools is emphasized in the YAL text? And, again, students might question that *at-ness* of the texts and their positioning as youth readers. Why are more graphic photos of the violence Malala experienced eliminated for youth readers? What is suggested about the interests of youth readers by the inclusion of more photos depicting Malala as a typical teenager and as successful in school?

ANALYZING THE TEXT: STUDYING FIRST CHAPTERS

After examining the peritextual features of the two versions of the memoir, students will have some critical questions in mind and confidence to analyze differences in the first chapters. Students can learn a great deal through comparative examination of the first few chapters, which we illustrate below.

Comparing Chapter Frames

Examining differences in the opening lines or paragraphs, or how a chapter is initially *framed*, provides an accessible way to begin a close analysis. Both versions of Malala's memoir begin with a prologue. The general market prologue begins with Malala's shooting. The first lines read, "I come from a country that was created at midnight. When I almost died it was just after midday. One year ago, I left my home for school and never returned. I was shot by a Taliban bullet and was flown out of Pakistan unconscious" (p. 3).

By contrast, the YAL prologue opens with Malala imagining her childhood bedroom, the sounds of neighborhood children playing, and the smell of her mother's cooking. The first lines read, "When I close my eyes, I can see my bedroom. The bed is unmade, my fluffy blanket in a heap, because I've rushed out for school, late for an exam" (p. 1). From these lines, students might question what the authors imagine will attract the attention of general market readers versus youth readers. For instance, students might notice that these lines suggest that while adult readers might be immediately drawn into a story of political violence, youth readers need to be drawn into Malala's experiences through a narrative that resonates with prototypical experiences of middle-class, Western teenagers—a narrative about struggling to wake up, running late for school, and catching the bus to make it on time for an exam. Students might begin to see that the YAL memoir is directed not just *at* teenagers, but *at* a specific vision of who the implied teenage audience of this book is and what that audience cares about.

Comparing Chapter Content

Once students examine the framing of each chapter, they can compare the texts by determining what has been added to or omitted from the YAL version. For instance, in both versions of the prologue, Malala reflects on her

life in Pakistan from her new home in England. In both, she recounts the day of her shooting. However, students will notice that the general market prologue includes references to Malala's political activity, threats made against her, and her mother's concerns for her safety. For instance, the general market version states, "I had started taking the bus because my mother was scared of me walking on my own . . . but the Taliban had never come for a girl and I was more concerned they would target my father, as he was always speaking out against them. His close friend and fellow campaigner Zahid Khan had been shot in the face in August" (p. 6). The YAL prologue omits this and other references to Malala's political activity and the dangerous world in which she lives, replacing references to army checkpoints on the bus's route with references to an ice-cream shop, a store front, and "a jumble of brightly colored rickshaws" (p. 6).

Finally, students will notice that the general market prologue includes specific details about Malala's shooting. For instance, "The first [shot] went through my left eye socket and out under my left shoulder. I slumped forward onto Moniba, blood coming from my left ear" (p. 9). The YAL version omits these details, and Malala's shooting is only mentioned preliminarily. On p. 5, she mentions a "strange, gnawing feeling that something bad was going to happen." The prologue takes the reader to the point where two young men stop the bus and ask, "Who is Malala?" The reader is left with a cliffhanger, much like those found in suspenseful children's literature, and must read on to find out what happens.

A close analysis of omissions and additions will continue to evoke questions about *at-ness*—in this case about what the authors assume their youth readers will know and be willing to think about with regard to political violence.

Comparing Anchor Images

Students can also examine differences in memoir pairs by studying how specific symbols, narratives, or images present in both versions are used to make different kinds of meaning—a concept we refer to as comparing "anchor images" (Sulzer et al., 2018). An anchor image found in chapter one of both versions of *I Am Malala* is Malala wanting to be "as free as a bird." By studying how this image is contextualized within each chapter, students will see that the image is used to accomplish different purposes in each version of the book.

In the original version, chapter one begins with Malala describing her parents' joy at her birth in contrast to the disappointment often felt in her culture when a girl is born. The chapter describes the beauty of the Swat Valley, the political and religious history of the region, her parents' loving marriage, her father's stories, and her mother's strength and beauty.

At the end of the chapter, Malala explains that as girls get older, they are often expected to stay indoors, cooking and serving men. She explains that tradition does not allow women to leave the house unattended by a man. The anchor image of Malala being "as free as a bird" is evoked in this

context. Malala states, “My father always said, ‘Malala will be free as a bird.’ I dreamed of going to the top of Mount Elum like Alexander the Great to touch Jupiter and even beyond the valley . . . I wondered how free a daughter could be” (p. 26). In the general market version, this anchor image in contextualized by Malala’s love and respect for her family, her traditions, and her homeland. The anchor image is about Malala’s dreams of being able to travel and explore life within and beyond her valley, but it does not suggest a rejection of her culture.

In the YAL version, chapter one begins with Malala stating that she is “a girl like any other,” explaining that, “I like cupcakes but not candy . . . I hate eggplant and green peppers, but I love pizza. I think Bella from *Twilight* is too fickle, and I don’t understand why she would choose that boring Edward” (p. 11). The chapter also details Malala’s squabbles with her brothers, her friendships, and other aspects of her daily life. While the general market version of this chapter delves into specific details of the unique cultural, political, and religious history of Malala’s homeland, the YAL version works to create a normalizing picture of Malala’s life as similar to that of a prototypical Western teenager.

Less detail is shared about Malala’s parents in this chapter. However, Malala shares a story about gatherings her parents often held where the women would cook and talk in the kitchen. She explains, “There were gentle, confiding whispers. Tinkling laughter sometimes. Raucous, uproarious laughter sometimes. But most stunning of all: The women’s headscarves and veils were gone. Their long dark hair and pretty faces—made up with lipstick and henna—were lovely to see” (p. 17). While no mention of headscarves or veils is made in the general market version, the YAL version makes clear that Malala sees women as freer and more beautiful when they are not wearing burqas or niqabs. She states, “to see these women chatting casually—their faces radiant with freedom—was to see a whole new world” (p. 17). It is within this context that the anchor image arises in this chapter. Malala states:

Living under wraps seemed so unfair—and uncomfortable. From an early age, I told my parents that no matter what others girls did, *I* would never cover my face like that. My face was my identity. My mother, who is quite devout and traditional was shocked . . . But my father said I could do as I wished. “Malala will be as free as a bird,” he told everyone.

(p. 18)

Through this analysis, students will see that the anchor image of Malala as free as a bird takes on different meaning in the YAL version of the memoir. While the general market version uses the anchor image to speak to Malala’s desire to more fully explore her world, it is used in the YAL version to position Malala as rejecting a cultural and religious practice about which Muslim women have complex and multifaceted beliefs. Students might pose questions about how they, in turn, are positioned as readers. For instance, what do the authors

assume about youth readers' ability/willingness to understand the nuances of the cultural and religious practices of Islam? What kinds of attitudes, beliefs, and interests do they believe youth readers will need to see in Malala in order to find her story compelling?

DEVELOPING A CRITICAL APPROACH TOWARD MCYAL THROUGH CCCA

MCYAL is a welcome and important addition to the secondary English classroom. And as our classrooms become increasingly diverse, it is more important than ever that we prepare all of our students with the tools to critically engage MCYAL. Critical engagement means not only learning to be open to the range of perspectives offered through MCYAL, but also learning to be critical of how MCYAL represents social constructs and positions readers. CCCA provides one important tool set for such critical engagement. Participating in a CCCA of the two versions of *I Am Malala* will prepare students for a critical approach to a more comprehensive study of the YAL version of the text, or of any MCYAL text. In approaching the YAL version of *I Am Malala*, in particular, students will be prepared to “talk back” to (Enciso, 1997) and problematize elements of the text that characterize Malala as a teenager with prototypically white, Western, adolescent interests, attitudes, and beliefs. They will be prepared to question the depictions of violence (or lack thereof) in the text and notice how contextual information about politics, culture, and religion is used in an effort to shape their interpretations of the text. In approaching YAL in general, engaging in a CCCA like the one we have described will heighten students' awareness of the ways in which they are positioned as youth readers by any given YAL text, allowing them the tools for disrupting that positioning.

SEE ALSO

Nazario, S. (2007). *Enrique's journey: The story of a boy's dangerous odyssey to reunite with his mother*. New York, NY: Random House.

Nazario, S. (2014). *Enrique's journey: The true story of a boy determined to reunite with his mother*. Toronto, CA: Ember.

Enrique's Journey is the story of a young man from Honduras who makes a treacherous and determined journey to find his mother, who left Honduras for the United States when Enrique was five years old. Teachers might engage students in a CCCA of the general market and adapted versions of this story, paying particular attention to the ways in which the two versions address immigration issues, poverty, cultural practices, and parent/child relationships.

Copeland, M. (2014). *Life in motion: An unlikely ballerina*. New York, NY: Touchstone.

Copeland, M. (2016). *Life in motion: An unlikely ballerina young readers edition*. New York, NY: Aladdin.

Life in Motion is Misty Copeland's memoir of her journey from a socioeconomically disadvantaged background to becoming the first African American principal dancer for the American Ballet Theatre. In leading students through a CCCA of the general market and adapted versions of this memoir, teachers might focus on differences in how the two memoirs position the role of race, social class, family, ambition, and talent in Copeland's rise to fame.

REFERENCES

- Applebee, A. N. (1993). *Literature in the secondary school: Studies of curriculum and instruction in the United States*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Enciso, P. (1997). Negotiating the meaning of difference: Talking back to multicultural literature. In T. Rogers & A. Soter (Eds.), *Reading across cultures: Teaching literature in a diverse society* (pp. 13–41). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Groenke, S. L., Haddix, M., Glenn, W. J., Kirkland, D. E., Price-Dennis, D., & Coleman-King, C. (2015). Disrupting and dismantling the dominant vision of youth of color. *English Journal*, 104(3), 35–40.
- Iser, W. (1978). *The implied reader: Patterns of communication in prose fiction from Bunyan to Beckett*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Lesko, N. (2012). *Act your age!: A cultural construction of adolescence* (2nd. ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Moore, W. (2010). *The other Wes Moore: One name, two fates*. New York, NY: Spiegel.
- Moore, W. (2012). *Discovering Wes Moore*. New York, NY: Delacorte.
- Stallworth, B., Gibbons, L., & Fauber, L. (2006). It's not on the list: An exploration of teachers' perspectives on using multicultural literature. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 49(6), 478–489.
- Sulzer, M., Thein, A. H., & Schmidt, R. (2018). What is adapted in youth adaptations?: A Critical Comparative Content Analysis of military memoirs repackaged as young adult literature. *Journal of Language & Literacy Education*, 14(1), 1–27.
- Thein, A. H., & Sulzer, M. A. (2015). Illuminating discourses of youth through the study of first-person narration in young adult literature. *English Journal*, 104(3), 47–53.
- Thein, A. H., Sulzer, M., & Schmidt, R. (2013). Engaging students in democracy through adolescent literature: Lessons from two versions of Wes Moore's memoir. *English Journal*, 103(2), 52–59.
- Yousafzai, M., & Lamb, C. (2013). *I am Malala: The girl who stood up for education and was shot by the Taliban*. New York, NY: Little, Brown.
- Yousafzai, M., & McCormick, P. (2014). *I am Malala: How one girl stood up for education and changed the world*. New York, NY: Little, Brown.

Deconstructing the Superhero

Interrogating the Racialization of Bodies Using *All-New, All-Different Avengers, Vol. 1*

Francisco L. Torres

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight how understanding, deconstructing, and critiquing popular culture can help engage youth in discussions of racialization and bodies presented as agentic or docile in this genre. Storey (2006) defines popular culture as “culture which is widely favorable or well-liked by many people,” the mainstream of any given culture (p. 6). Thus, popular culture is shared by many people while also affecting the public at the individual level. Nealon and Giroux (2003) argue that one of the most crucial reasons to study popular culture is not so much to learn from it but to examine how it teaches us certain things (e.g., what love is or what’s the ideal body?). As a result, popular culture can potentially teach us about power structures, class, and privilege, and its messages are often reinforced through politics and schools.

One such popular culture phenomenon that is worth engaging with and deconstructing in our classrooms is the superhero genre (defined generally as the differing forms, movies, comics, TV, etc., in which superheroes are foregrounded and drive the narrative being told [Torres and Tayne, 2017].) This genre has seen an increase in visibility in the United States since the early 2000s with movies like *Batman Begins* (Nolan, 2005), *The Amazing Spider-man* (Webb, 2012), and *Black Panther* (Coogler, 2018). This visibility has increased over the years with three to four superhero movies released annually; as a result, superhero-themed curricula have become prevalent, and students often sport superhero merchandise in schools.

I will begin this chapter by discussing race as a phenomenon within a system that positions people of color as “docile” bodies whose agency has been forcibly stripped away by systems of oppression such as racism. I will then conduct an analysis of the *All-New, All-Different Avengers, Vol. 1: The Magnificent Seven* (Waid and Ross, 2016) graphic novel, focusing on how bodies are positioned in relation to agency and passivity. I argue that youth can resist the portrayal of people of color as docile bodies by reimagining the superhero genre. By engaging in such an exercise, youth can see themselves as agents for social change.

RACE AS SYSTEMIC PHENOMENON

Bonilla-Silva (2017) argues that race, like other social categories, is constructed (p. 8). Race is not something that we are born with but something created by external forces, allowing individuals to differentiate from each other based on external appearance. Omi and Winant (2014) argue that “race is ocular in an irreducible way. Human bodies are visually read, understood, and narrated by means of symbolic meanings and associations” (p. 13). Unfortunately, differences based on appearance rather than biology have created a system in the United States that privileges whiteness. As Omi and Winant (2014) point out, “race is . . . not an illusion. While it may not be ‘real’ in a biological sense, race is indeed real as a social category with definite social consequences” (p. 110). In short, race, although socially constructed, has very real consequences for bodies of color.

The “othering” of people of color through the institutional implementation of racial categories has become an integral part of this country; “race is a fundamental organizing principle of social stratification. It has influenced the definition of rights and privileges, the distribution of resources, and the ideologies and practices of subordination and oppression” (Omi & Winant, 2014, p. 107). In other words, while racial categories are imprecise and arbitrary, “race does ideological and political work” (Omi & Winant, 2014, p. 111). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) add that “thinking of race strictly as an ideological construct denies the reality of a racialized society and its impact on ‘raced’ people in their everyday lives” (p. 48). In other words, race is constructed, but that construction has very real implications for those who are othered by such racial categories since racism, the disempowering and discriminating of others based on race, is systemic (e.g., Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Omi & Winant, 2014). This othering due to racial categories is seen very clearly in popular culture. The movie *Ghost in the Shell*, for example, cast a white actress to play an Asian character. In popular culture, much like the US in general, we see people of color constantly erased from narratives or relegated to supportive roles or token character roles with no real purpose beyond providing diversity.

Racialization has also affected the superhero genre, especially as it relates to those who are portrayed as heroes and those who are the recipients of “justice.” Rarely are bodies of color made into heroes, and when they are, they typically take the form of minor characters; furthermore, race is rarely acknowledged as a factor that may affect these characters differently than their white counterparts. Instead, most comics that include heroes of color act from a post-race framework that fails to account for race as something people of color deal with every day.

POSITIONING BODIES

Racial categories and racialization in general affect bodies of color. Before people get to introduce themselves to another person, that person will make assumptions based on physical appearance alone. Bonilla-Silva (2017) adds

that this racial structure has benefited one group over others, defining it as “the totality of the social relations and practices that reinforce white privilege” (p. 9). Through this we understand that white bodies have benefited from racialization since they created this system in the US, making black and brown bodies subservient to that system.

Foucault (1977) argued that “discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, ‘docile’ bodies” (p. 138). Cruz (2001) adds that “nothing provokes the custodians of normality and objectivity more than the excessiveness of a body” (p. 659). By excessiveness, Cruz refers to how bodies of color are positioned in the United States, especially as it relates to indigenous and historical ways of being, thinking, and making sense of the world that do not align with dominant, colonialist ways of being. Moreover, Cruz points out that the US has gone through great lengths to make docile the “excessiveness” of black and brown bodies.

This idea is reflected in the superhero genre, especially in recent Marvel movies like *Captain America: Civil War* (Russo and Russo, 2016). Unlike many other superhero movies in the United States, this movie has heroes of color, but they follow white leaders such as Iron Man and Captain America and are drawn into a struggle initiated by the former. As demonstrated in the promotional image for the movie, Captain America and Iron Man are front and center as the leaders of this war; Falcon is next to Captain America and looks much smaller than him, while Black Panther is far in the back on Iron Man’s side. As demonstrated by the movie poster, this “civil war” is a white struggle for domination rather than something for/by the heroes of color. Again, in this case, the bodies of heroes of color are pushed into the periphery so as not to overshadow the two white characters vying for their ideal versions of their world.

However, some strides have been made in relation to representations of bodies of color. This is most clear in the comics themselves (e.g., Ms. Marvel [Wilson and Alphona, 2014] and Ultimate Comics Spider-Man [Bendis and Pichelli, 2015], to name a few) rather than the movies, with Black Panther as an exception. In the following section, All-New, All-Different Avengers, Vol. 1: The Magnificent Seven (Waid and Ross, 2016) will be used to discuss some of these strides, especially as they relate to the bodies of heroes of color as agentive forces for change rather than passive recipients. It is worth noting that this discussion is also meant to highlight that as long as students only see the superhero genre through the lens of the movies released, they will find it hard to see themselves as agents for change since the movies have primarily highlighted the experiences/problems of white individuals.

ADDRESSING RACE IN MARVEL COMICS

Examination of this new Avengers text first reveals the image of the seven heroes on the front of the graphic novel: Thor, Vision, Captain America, Iron Man, Ms. Marvel, Nova, and Spider-Man. These seven heroes are not portrayed as docile bodies in need of saving, but rather these white, black, and brown

bodies are depicted as powerful agents in the Marvel Universe who are ready to defend the Earth from whatever villain threatens it. However, it is worth noting that this specific volume is written by a white man, Mark Waid. This fact is worth understanding and deconstructing, especially as we engage with a text primarily made up of heroes of color whose realities are shaped by a white man. That will not be the focus for this chapter, but I will mention that he, using his privilege as a white male and famous writer of comics, has stood up for younger LGBTQ+, persons of color, and other creators of diverse characters as they struggle with threats from readers because of the topics and characters they have wished to write about (Midura, 2017). This, at the very least, is a good sign in relation to his political beliefs but does not take away from the fact that black and brown lives are being told through a white lens.

One of the greatest strengths of this text, especially as it relates to how bodies are positioned and race, more generally, is the diversity of characters that make up this new Avengers team. This new team is made up of two white characters, Iron Man and Thor (female version); one android, Vision; one female Muslim character, Ms. Marvel; one African American character, Captain America; one Latinx character, Nova; and one African American/Latinx character, Miles Morales. This team, unlike other Avenger groups before them, better represents the diversity found in our current world and that diversity also pushes the people of the Marvel Universe to question it as much as it is questioned in current US politics as well. For example, in chapter one, Captain America saves a family from its car as the car is falling into the river below. It is worth noting, before continuing the example, that the Captain America referred to here is Sam Wilson. Sam used to be the Falcon, the original Captain America's sidekick, and was given Captain America's shield and name after Captain America could not continue being that symbol. Going back to the example, after saving the family, Sam Wilson brings the family to land where spectators are there waiting for him. One member of the family yells eagerly, "It's **Captain America**," and then another points out, "not **my** Captain America" (Waid et al., 2016, all bold font in this quote and forward can be found in the original text). In this scene, we see that although Sam Wilson has taken up the mantle of Captain America, people still consider him not to be Captain America, either because they associate the name with the original or because of Sam's race. It is worth noting that the individual that argued "not **my** Captain America" was white.

The scene continues with Captain America being asked if he would be willing to buy some girl cadet cookies from a child, but then other children ask him the same thing. Captain America can only buy from one child because he does not have money on him to purchase more. The crowd around him starts to question which girl Captain America will buy the cookies from because they notice that he has to choose between a white girl or a black girl, stating "place your bets." This scene is an example of where race is brought up in relation to Captain America, especially as it relates to how he is racialized by white characters. He points out, while talking to Tony (Iron Man) about the situation, "that I had

to ‘handle’ it at all is the **draining** part. Having camera phones and cable news agenda-izing your **every move** into a **racially based narrative** is . . . is . . . the job. It’s the job” (chapter one, n.p). Captain America sees that the media and the people around him are waiting for him to make a mistake, are waiting for him to choose a “certain kind” of person over another based on race to attack him. Unlike heroes like Iron Man (Tony Stark), who have never really had to think about their race in relation to their work because they are white, Captain America is constantly having to balance his work with his race. This constant juggle for Captain America as he tries to please all people attempts to position him as less than or docile, making him question his every action and hesitation to act, but he pushes past the words of the white characters because, as he says, “it’s the job.”

Due to the systemic issues related to race, like racism and white supremacy, people of color, heroes of color, will always have to work against that system and try to change it for the better. However, if they choose not to resist, they then allow the system to win and in turn become the docile bodies white supremacy wishes to create of the bodies of people of color. Sam Wilson, Miles Morales, Samuel Alexander, and Kamala Khan are all excellent examples of people of color working within a racialized system while also resisting that system. As heroes of color, they demonstrate that even with superpowers a person’s race does not disappear, and resistance to white supremacy and racism is still necessary.

Another example, concerning the whole team, occurs after the team defeats Cyclone, a weather-storm-creating villain who was destroying Atlantic City. Here, one of two white individuals who was saved by the new Avengers team argues, “whoop-de-doo. Rescued by the **understudy Avengers**,” and the other adds, “where are the **real** ones? Man the world’s getting so **politically correct** these days!” (chapter four, n.p.). In this scene, race is pushed to the forefront by the white spectators but so, too, is the fact that the new team has two women, one white and one Muslim. Much like the bodies of people of color are constantly positioned as docile or less than, the bodies of women have also been historically portrayed as docile for differing reasons. In this case, bodies of people of color and women are seen as abnormal, as not meant to save these two white men and framed as an attempt to be politically correct rather than acknowledging the work done by these heroes to become Avengers. It is also worth noting, although it will not be fully discussed in this chapter, that Thor in this work is Jane Foster. Jane suffers from breast cancer, and the only reason she is able to fight is because she can wield Thor’s hammer. However, wielding the hammer does not heal her cancer; instead, each time she wields it, it counters and lessens the effects of her radiation treatments for the cancer. In this case, we see the sick also being able to fight for the world and sacrificing it all for others, which is extremely uncommon in the superhero genre or most literary genres where the sick are typically portrayed as weak/docile and unable to save anyone, including themselves.

What we see in this piece is that heroes of color are still plagued by a racialized system that sees them as less, even as they are, literally, more powerful than most. This point is important to consider because reading this kind of text with youth can help them see that: 1) people of color can be heroes; 2) even as heroes, racialized systems will still try to make them docile; and 3) even as that system exists, there are ways to resist it and that resistance is necessary, especially as youth of color seek to create/imagine more hopeful futures concerning social justice and equity.

YOUTH OF COLOR IMAGINING HOPEFUL FUTURES

Rarely do youth of color get to see themselves in the texts they read, and this occurrence happens even less in the superhero genre. I have found that many youth of color have not heard of characters like Miles Morales, and instead are only aware of the white superhero characters that are popularized in TV shows and cinema, like Iron Man or Dr. Strange. One of the first steps in encouraging youth of color to see themselves as social agents is to show them examples of people of color being social agents themselves. For example, *All-New, All-Different Avengers, Vol. 1* decenters the “normative” white superhero shown in popular culture, instead showing the power and potential of people of differing cultures, races, religions, etc., fighting together to make change for everyone. However, beyond seeing themselves in the texts they read as agents of change, youth of color must also be encouraged to imagine themselves as those agents as well. If systems of oppression, like racialization, seek to create docile bodies, then imagination, which Medina & Wohlwend (2014) argue is the antithesis of control, can help to deconstruct racist systems that privilege whiteness rather than the “other” and then reconstruct a more equitable world. In this case, students should be asked to center themselves as heroes with the power to change the world for better. This is not about asking students to create an alternative character they can be or wish to be, but rather to make a hero who represents who they are racially, linguistically, etc., who just so happens to have powers. Students must see themselves as agents of change and then maybe, even through a fictitious world, they can begin to examine how they could make real change in our world.

Building on the above, my prior work (Torres & Tayne, 2017), and the work with others (Enciso, 2016), teachers/researchers can begin by helping create an imagined world for youth of color to figure themselves into and center that world around the realities of youth of color. For example, as youth are asked to create their superhero origin story, the story of how they became a superhero, youth could be asked to write a timeline about their own lives and add in an event that gave them powers at the end of the timeline. In this way, the lived experiences/knowledge of youth of color (like language, culture, etc.) are not detached from the superhero character they create, but rather fully integrated and real.

Another important aspect of this work is to center the real issues youth of color see in their communities, from the local to the global, in the stories they create. The point is not to create heroes for heroes' sake, but rather to encourage youth to use their imagined selves to help their community in a variety of ways, like using their powers to stop bullies or challenge the rhetoric of those in power like Donald Trump. Leonardo (2013) points out, quite profoundly, that "if people of color have represented anything in the history of race relations, it is hope" (p. 165). Encouraging youth of color to create stories in which they are able to imagine, discuss, and embody resistance can help them see themselves as agents of change in an oppressive system that seeks to make them docile.

As students are asked to create stories in which they face off against injustice, it is important to note that students should never be allowed to choose killing as their way of solving injustice. Instead, the point of students creating stories in which they face off against injustice is to encourage them to use their powers and knowledge of the real world to think of real ways of engaging in a democracy, like the one here in the US. They could fight their villain as is done in movies and comics, but their villain cannot represent, for example, racism in all its layers, and thus it is important to ask students what their heroes can do to fight racism as a whole and encourage others to do the same. For example, their heroes could promote the power of protest or voting. In that sense, these stories can also help them stay/be hopeful in a battle that, as Captain America put it, can seem "impossible," but "it's the job" and it's necessary. The racialized system found in the US will not eliminate itself. Only resistance from many can help turn this system around, but that work needs a lot of hope and this work may be one of the ways of inspiring that hope in youth of color.

DISCUSSION

The superhero genre can act as a tool for youth of color to imagine better futures and see themselves as agentive individuals who have the ability to create change in imagined spaces and in turn manifest hope in the real world related to their ability to do the same here. Youth have much power when it comes to their ability to engage with and change the ways in which they interact with the world around them. If youth of color are encouraged in classrooms and other spaces to resist systems of oppression and stand up for issues of social justice and equity, they may then be able to help turn around the political climate we find ourselves in now as it relates to the racist, xenophobic, and sexist rhetoric used in our political system. Part of this work may need to be creating connections between differing subjects, like history, so that students learn real ways of resisting systems of oppression and thus further expand on those ways in literacy classrooms and imagined worlds. Teachers and researchers must be willing to become political and engage with the racialization of the youth in our classrooms. When we do, we may help the youth in our classrooms imagine a better world than the world they have now.

SEE ALSO

Wilson, G. W., and Alphona, A. (2014). *Ms. Marvel: No normal*. New York, NY: Marvel.

In this text, Ms. Marvel, Kamala Khan, comes into her powers and identities as a female Muslim superhero. This text would work well in relation to the critical view discussed above concerning bodies if used in conjunction with popular discourse around those from the Middle East. In the US, especially after 9/11, we have come to use problematic frames to discuss the Middle East and those from it, and Ms. Marvel can be used to talk back to those frames and re-center the lives of those who may seem different than our own.

Bendis, B. M., and Pichelli, S. (2015). *Ultimate comics Spider-Man*. New York, NY: Marvel.

Instead of Peter Parker, this text highlights the life and transformation of Miles Morales as he becomes the first half-black, half-Latinx Spider-Man. This text, much like the others discussed above, re-centers the diversity found in the US, rather than the attempt of many popular culture systems to continuously create white saviors. This text can be used with students to discuss what it means to be biracial in a society that still sees being biracial as odd and compounds differing forms of oppression on bodies that go outside of white heteronormative views of the world.

REFERENCES

- Bendis, B. M., & Pichelli, S. (2015). *Ultimate comics Spider-Man*. New York, NY: Marvel.
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2017). *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in the United States*. New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Coogler, R. (Director). (2018). *Black Panther* [Motion picture]. Burbank, CA: Marvel Studios.
- Cruz, C. (2001). Toward an epistemology of a brown body. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 14(5), 657–669.
- Enciso, P. (2016). *Presidential address*. Speech presented at LRA Conference in Nashville, Tennessee.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books.
- Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. F. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record*, 97(1), 47–68.
- Leonardo, Z. (2013). *Race frameworks: A multidimensional theory of racism and education*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Medina, C. L., & Wohlwend, K. E. (2014). *Literacy, play and globalization: Converging imaginaries in children's critical and cultural performances* (Vol. 115). New York, NY: Routledge.

- Midura, T. (2017, September 25). *Mark Waid can't bring peace to the comics galaxy*. Retrieved from www.theouthousers.com/index.php/news/139263-to-no-one-s-surprise-mark-waid-can-t-bring-peace-to-the-comics-galaxy.html.
- Nealon, J. T., & Giroux, S. S. (2003). *The theory toolbox: Critical concepts for the humanities, arts, and social sciences*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Nolan, C. (Director). (2005). *Batman begins* [Motion picture on DVD]. Burbank, CA: Warner Bros. Entertainment, Inc.
- Omi, M., & Winant, H. (2014). *Racial formation in the United States*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Russo, A., & Russo, J. (Directors). (2016). *Captain America: Civil war* [Motion picture]. Burbank, CA: Marvel Studios.
- Storey, J. (2006). *Cultural theory and popular culture: A reader* (3rd ed.). Harlow, England: Pearson/Prentice Hall.
- Torres, F. L., & Tayne, K. (2017). Super heroes, villains, and politics: Elementary youth superhero narratives in an afterschool program. *English Teaching: Practice & Critique*, 16(3), 375–390.
- Waid, M., & Ross, A. (2016). *All-new, all-different avengers, vol. 1: The magnificent seven*. New York, NY: Marvel.
- Webb, M. (Director). (2012). *The amazing Spider-man* [Motion picture]. Universal City, CA: Universal Studios.
- Wilson, G. W., and A. Alphona. (2014). *Ms. Marvel: No Normal*. New York: Marvel.

Arts-Based Approaches to Social Justice in Literature

Exploring the Intersections of Magical Realism and Identities in *When the Moon Was Ours*

Christine N. Stamper and Mary Catherine Miller

Imagine a small town. On the surface, it feels like any other in America. There are squabbles between social groups at the high school. People fall in and out of love, then look for ways to mend their broken hearts. People gossip. But beneath the surface, this town is unlike any other. A young girl appears from the wreckage of a fallen water tower. As she grows, so do roses from her wrist. A young boy paints and hangs moons around town which may help temper sadness, anger, and loneliness. A field grows mostly glass pumpkins, and while the farmer despairs, he sees it as a normal, if unfortunate, plight. This is the world of Anna-Marie McLemore's *When the Moon Was Ours* (2016), which incorporates the whimsy of magical realism to discuss identity: of life in a small town, of brown bodies, and of those who do not conform to cisnormative gender expectations.

This chapter uses McLemore's novel as a focal text to examine representations of Latinx identity, trans bodies, and gender. We assert that discussions of identities, particularly those of race and gender, are critical within the genre of magical realism, as they allow for traditionally marginalized populations not to be erased into assumptions of whiteness, heteronormativity, and other societal oppressions. We use a framework of arts-based pedagogies to demonstrate ways in which secondary teachers can bring these conversations into classrooms, illuminating intersectionality and creating more inclusive spaces for students. As students create art, they create meaning grounded in their own conceptions of gender, race, and identity, meanings which are then placed into conversation with the trans and people of color (POC) characters in McLemore's novel. By engaging with elements of magical realism in the novel, students use fluidity and intangibility in their art and thus their interpretations of identity, resulting in deeper understandings of both the focal text and frequently marginalized identities.

The novel interacts with societal constructions of gender through two characters, Aracely and Sam. Aracely was born Leandro, but despite knowing she was a girl, she recalls how “my mother always told me how handsome I was, how happy she was to have a son. So there was no space for” Aracely to be herself (p. 104). Fighting a curse, Leandro’s mother drowns in a river, and Leandro is swept under the water; however, “the water took Leandro, folded him into its current, brought him back as the girl he’d always wished he could grow into” (p. 102). This conversion can be read as a metaphorical rebirth—with the death of her mother, Aracely was finally able to become herself. Many magical elements exist within the diegesis of *When the Moon Was Ours*, which are seen as natural parts of the world. In contrast, Sam’s gender nonconformity is not linked to the magical. Sam’s relationship to his body and gender is less binary than the stories traditionally seen in YA stories and media representations more broadly. For instance, he recalls feeling a “clawing envy” to the stories his grandmother has told him of the Pakistani tradition of “bacha posh” or “[g]irls whose parents decided that, until they were grown, they would be sons” (p. 35). This background situates gender nonconformity as existing not just within US or Western contexts.

Sam’s gendered differences are noticed by boys at school, and he is teased occasionally for his soft face. However, Sam drew a line of what he would do to fit in, “he didn’t pack, didn’t stuff a pair of socks into his underwear. Didn’t fill a condom with dry grain or hair gel or any of the other ridiculous ideas they’d considered” (p. 183). Sam is a boy. But his narrative is not one of transitioning or coming out. Rather, to accept his embodied self as a boy. Sam says, “I still have to live like this. Nothing is gonna fix me. There’s no water that’s going to make me into something else” (p. 154). By comparing Aracely’s water-born transition, similar to the hormone- and surgery-based transitions seen throughout most representations of trans and gender nonconforming, to the fluid and unembodied version of Sam’s gender, students are able to understand that there are multiple ways of being trans, rather than accepting a media-perpetuated single-story.

In addition to telling the stories of Sam and Aracely, *When the Moon Was Ours* follows protagonist Miel, who is infamous in her small hometown. Not only have Miel and Sam been inseparable for years, but their families stand out in their primarily white community. Miel, who is Mexican American, came to the town when she was five, appearing out of an old water tower as it falls. Sam is multiracial, with a Pakistani-American mother, and hides the details of his life before moving to the town. McLemore’s book is full of captivating characters, beautiful writing, and the potential to educate about both trans and brown bodies and the tradition of magical realism. This use of magical realism allows a mediation between readers and trans and racial identities shown throughout the text. The balancing of real-world marginalizations and artistic representations models a different way to conceptualize, discuss, and deconstruct identities for students in classrooms.

MAGICAL REALISM

Discussions of magical realism within youth literature scholarship are certainly not new (Latham, 2007; Rudge, 2006; Faris, 1995); however, these conversations often ignore the ways in which Latin American tradition has shaped and influenced the genre. While canonical magical realist texts by García Márquez and Allende are taught in many secondary classrooms, we assert YA texts like *When the Moon Was Ours* are equally valuable. We also aim to assure that Latinx culture—and people of color more broadly—are included in discussions about gender and sexuality.

While magical realism does not exist solely in Latinx literature, it has become a genre linked specifically with Latinx authors and literature after Latinx writers rediscovered heavily symbolistic works such as Kafka after World War I and incorporated this type of writing into their own works (Flores, 1955). While Latin American authors had been incorporating elements of magical realism into their works since the early 20th century, Flores sees 1935 as the “point of departure of this new phase in Latin American literature,” as Borges’s influential *Historia universal de la infamia* came out that year (p. 191). Flores continues, “The practitioners of magical realism cling to reality as if to prevent ‘literature’ from getting in their way, as if to prevent their myth from flying off, as in fairy tales, to supernatural realms. The narrative proceeds in well-prepared, increasingly intense steps, which ultimately lead to one great ambiguity or confusion” (p. 191). Warnes (2005), citing Chanady (1985), identifies

a three-part taxonomy of magical realism: the magical realist text must display coherently developed codes of natural and supernatural, the antinomy between these codes must be resolved, and a measure of authorial reticence must be in place in order to ensure that the co-existence and legitimacy of both codes is not threatened.

(p. 6)

These strong connections between magical realism and Latinx identity can be found in the syllabi of high school “world literature” courses that include texts like *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* (García Márquez, 1981), “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings” (García Márquez, 1972), *Like Water for Chocolate* (Esquivel, 1989), and *The House of the Spirits* (Allende, 1982).

Within literature for young readers, specifically, magic serves as a subversion that is tied to the formation of identity (Bowers, 2004; Latham, 2007). According to Latham (2007), magical elements serve as “a primary catalyst for identity formation” (p. 62). The genre of magical realism, often characterized by fluidity, intangibility, and the abstract, provides an entrance for readers to discuss topics such as gender and sexuality, which are similarly fluid and intangible. Through utilizing YA novels that pair nonnormative development (e.g., breaking from heteronormativity) with magical elements, we believe that secondary students will develop readings not only of a rich literary tradition

that extends beyond the Anglo-European authors most commonly taught in classes, but also of intersectional and marginalized populations.

In their seminal study on GLBTQ-themed YA literature, Cart and Jenkins (2006) highlight the need for “more GLBTQ books featuring characters of color” (p. 165). Similarly, Lo (2014) found that only 11 LGBTQ-themed YA novels published in 2014 featured characters of color (23.4% of the LGBTQ YA novels that came out that year). As over half of the student population in public schools identify as people of color (NCES, 2016), there is a critical need for characters of color, LGBTQ characters of color, and the intersections of these identities. Intersectionality “names and makes visible identities that have long been considered inappropriate and deviant, [and] it must also take into account the racialized, classed, and gendered ways sexuality is embodied and lived” (Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2016, p. 89). Hermann-Wilmarth and Ryan (2016) discuss intersectionality as a way to break homonormativity, because “people on both sides of the hetero/homo binary experience relative degrees of privilege based on their other identity markers” (p. 89). Because of the ways in which *When the Moon Was Ours* explicitly discusses the intersection of race, ethnicity, and gender with and alongside magic, the book is an avenue for teachers to broach conversations about these themes. We do not argue that magical realism makes the experiences of trans bodies or racial and ethnic minorities more palatable for cis, white readers through the lens of fantasy, but rather that magical realism is a genre of transformation, acceptance, and subversion, in which minoritized readers may find reflections of themselves in ways distinct from contemporary realistic YA fiction. Through incorporating Latinx YA literature with magical realism into the classroom and discussing the cultural implications of these themes and identities, teachers validate the lives of this growing student population.

ARTS-BASED PEDAGOGIES

Drawing on the ideas of Rosenblatt (1978), Smith and Herring (1996) situate arts-based pedagogies as the way the “interactive process between the reader and a text becomes a transaction as the reader gives ‘life’ to the pages of print through an aesthetic involvement” (p. 103). As readers aesthetically respond to texts, these transactions create deeper connections to literary texts that allow our students to relate their own lives to the characters’ experiences, giving readers a greater investment and entrance to discussions of the novel (Smith & Herring, 1996; Whitelaw, 2017). We take up Efland’s (2002) conceptualization of an integrated arts pedagogy, incorporating symbol-processing and sociocultural perspectives that allow our students to rely on existing symbol systems (Eisner, 2002), while also expanding their own knowledge and making meaning by linking art into everyday experiences. As students bring their own lived experiences into their art, arts-based pedagogies can open avenues for discussing issues of equity and diversity. Within diverse classroom

settings, the students' lives naturally allow for a diversification of understanding. Within more homogenous groups, these conversations can still be sparked by comparing and contrasting the consistent stories to those that differ from characters in the novel or societal understandings of life at large. The act of creating art is transformational, allowing students to participate in the creation of meaning and invest in deeper understandings of both the characters within the text and the broader world in which we live. Below, we provide examples of ways secondary teachers can direct their students into these conversations using *When the Moon Was Ours* and arts-based activities.

Visual Autobiography: Identity

Our first proposed activity is based on Whitelaw's (2017) "multimodal memoirs" (p. 62) in which students "create a visual body autobiography from a paper cutout" (p. 54). Ideally, students will be allowed to engage with multimodal tools to draw and collage representations of themselves that can be shared with the class. After students make artistic representations of themselves, what Whitehall describes as "rendering themselves visually and symbolically" (p. 54), teachers can ask them to consider what aspects of their identities they chose to include or exclude in their artwork. We especially encourage teachers to question their inclusion/exclusion of race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, and socioeconomic class and incorporate definitions and discussions of intersectionality into these conversations. In our experience, students who come from majority groups do not include these categories into artistic autobiographies, instead incorporating representations of hobbies, interests, career aspirations, and familial relations. We do not mean to dismiss these identity categories as unimportant, but rather propose that our white, middle-class, heterosexual students tend not to list these categories as a result of privilege or homogeneity, while students of color, members of LGBTQ communities, and other minoritized groups do include these marginalized identities in representations of themselves.

Following a discussion of the ways the students' visual autobiographies represent their identities, we encourage a return to the text to consider how certain identities are treated differently for different characters. We have asked students to propose what imagery Sam or Miel might have included if the characters were to create their own visual autobiographies, encouraging them to return to the novel for support for their arguments, thus weaving our discussions and personal interpretations of intersectionality and identity back into the text.

The Visual Autobiography can be adapted in a variety of ways—for example, with a particular focus on sexuality—asking students to make ephemeral concepts of identity into tangible works of art that showcase their understandings of both the text and themselves. We suggest that these activities be initiated with little explanation from the teacher, giving students freedom and time to grapple with their own conceptions of identity and how to visually depict

these concepts, sparking discussions of process and articulation, as students create meaning through the creation of art.

Found Poetry Self-Reflections: Gender

To facilitate discussions of gender, we propose a Found Poetry exercise that asks students to create a poem from words within *When the Moon Was Ours*. One of our favorite versions of the activity asks students to create a poetic representation of their own gender using found poetry—asking them to find reflections of themselves within the source text. In past exercises, students have asked for clarification and parameters for the project, needing time not only to mentally engage with their conceptions of what it means to be masculine or feminine, but also how to begin the process of writing poetry and seeking out the “right” words within the source text. We encourage teachers to allow students the time to feel and work through this discomfort, pointing them back to the source text to find inspiration. As Eisner (2002) describes, arts-based pedagogies encourage critical thinking, giving students the chance to “explore what is uncertain, to exercise judgment free from prescriptive rules and procedures” (p. 10). The process of writing found poetry provides a degree of structure to the creative process, as the words are already written within the source text, yet poetry can also break the traditional grammatical rules and norms, just as magical realism pushes the boundaries of reality, both paving the way for discussions that push back against heteronormativity.

As students search for phrases and words related to their own gendered experience, they must take into account the ways in which the characters of *When the Moon Was Ours* experience and enact masculinity and femininity. Students may find representations of physical attributes they associate with the performance of gender, but the nature of poetry forces them to dig further into descriptions, and McLemore’s characters challenge a binary representation of gender. While the Bonner family of sisters initially appear as a single unit, “pretty and perfect” to Miel (p. 11), the novel reveals their individual qualities as the sisters fight to name themselves outside of their physical appearance and relationship to one another. As Sam claims, physical features of his body “could not name him” (p. 266), and Ivy Bonner comes to a similar realization when her hair changes color at the end of the novel, separating her from her sisters.

McLemore’s novel contains vivid imagery and magical realism that allow students to play with and explore interpretations of their own gender. In this exercise, prior students have incorporated images like moons, roses, and rivers into artistic representations of their gender. When students share their poetry, class discussion can examine the iconography of common symbols and shared language, and how these images may reflect or challenge binary representations of gender. We suggest that teachers engage the class in thinking about the ways that their gender does or does not align with idealized versions of femininity and masculinity. Previously, we accomplished this using Killermann’s (2013)

TEDx Talk, “Understanding the Complexities of Gender,” which both explains gender stereotypes, but also showcases the falsity of binary notions of gender. Through found poetry, students engage deeply with the novel and are challenged to articulate gender beyond the binary and push their understandings of the world.

Tracing Transitions: Gender Nonconformity

To discuss the multiple paths of transition appearing in *When the Moon Was Ours*, we propose an activity we call Tracing Transitions in which students paint (or draw, collage, etc.) a depiction of a character’s relationship to their gender through the text. We encourage teachers to have multiple media for their students to work with for this assignment, as different media can tell the same stories in different ways. For *When the Moon Was Ours*, students create two pieces of art: one depicting Aracely’s transformation and one depicting Sam’s transformation. These art pieces should be informed by close readings of the text. The passages that serve as inspiration for their art should be stronger when read in conjunction with the students’ work and vice versa.

In this exercise, students engage with the magic of Aracely’s transformation, as Aracely’s physical rebirth in the water is sudden and outside of our reality. Reflecting on students’ depictions of Aracely, we ask them to examine the role of magical realism in the novel and its depiction of trans identity. Do other characters accept Aracely into the community? How does Aracely describe herself before and after her transformation? What might her transformation be a metaphor for in our world? How do these transformations compare to Sam’s experience breaking from cisnormativity? In what ways are these characters’ journeys similar? In what ways do they differ? We encourage students to push beyond the obvious answers here and deeply analyze the passages in the text in order to compare, contrast, and consider how their lives would look in our nonmagical world. This could even be the start of a longer assignment that involves research on trans bodies, the medical and nonmedical interventions available to them, and the policies policing them.

CONCLUSION

As students look internally to their own experiences and create a physical representation of the ephemeral via arts-based activities, they, by necessity, confront their understandings of abstract concepts. The activities we propose above, specifically paired with *When the Moon Was Ours*, can easily be adapted for use with other YA novels, with or without elements of magical realism—for instance, *The Strange and Beautiful Sorrows of Ava Lavender* (Walton, 2014), a contemporary novel reminiscent of two works by Márquez. (See the “See Also” box.)

However, these same techniques can be applied to texts that do not contain any magical realist elements, as we described in the “See Also” box. No matter

the text(s) paired with these activities, we encourage teachers to participate in these activities alongside their students. As teachers, we must acknowledge the inherent role of the authority we have within our classrooms and endeavor not to model “correct” forms of engagement through art but rather participate in our own authentic transactions with a text alongside our students to co-create meaning and share in the transformative process. Mirroring the vulnerability that can come with both the arts and discussions of societal injustice, we can help our students see the ways that these conversations, though sometimes difficult, can be the foundation for advocating for equity in the world around us.

SEE ALSO

Walton, L. (2014). *The strange and beautiful sorrows of Ava Lavender*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick.

The story follows several generations of the same family, as in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (García Márquez, 1967), and centers on Ava, a girl born with wings who is mistaken for an angel, as in “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings” (García Márquez, 1972). Not only can this text be used in conjunction with either canonical work, but Ava’s overarching plot can be incorporated into the classroom to discuss issues of abuse and rape. Teachers can use arts-based pedagogies like the ones in this chapter to explore representations of power and consent.

Sáenz, B.A. (2012). *Aristotle and Dante discover the secrets of the universe*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.

A contemporary realistic fiction featuring gay Latino teenagers. Even without the fluidity of magical realism, the activities provided in this chapter can still allow students and teachers to grapple with intersections of ethnicity and sexuality in a text like Sáenz’s. The novel can also be placed in conversation with canonical romance texts to discuss who is allowed to love whom and the differences of plot conventions for heterosexual versus LGBTQ relationships.

Taylor, L. (2017). *Strange the dreamer*. Boston: Little Brown.

A fantasy novel about a smart, shy librarian who gets to visit a city he thought was myth where he meets people once thought to be gods. A generation ago these gods were slain, but their blue-skinned children still live in hiding. The fear and hatred of these young people can be used to discuss the ways in which ignorance and fear place into racial tensions.

REFERENCES

- Allende, I. (1982). *The house of the spirits*. New York, NY: Knopf.
 Bowers, M. A. (2004). *Magic(al) realism: The new critical idiom*. New York, NY: Routledge.

- Cart, M., & Jenkins, C. (2006). *The heart has its reasons: Young adult literature with gay/lesbian/queer content, 1969–2004*. New York, NY: Scarecrow Press.
- Chanady, A. B. (1985). *Magical realism and the fantastic resolved versus unresolved antinomy*. New York, NY: Garland.
- Efland, A. D. (2002). *Art and cognition: Integrating the visual arts in the curriculum*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Eisner, E. W. (2002). *The arts and the creation of mind*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Esquivel, L. (1989). *Like water for chocolate*. Logan, IA: Perfection Learning.
- Faris, W. B. (1995). Scheherazade's children: Magical realism and post modern fiction. In L. P. Zamora & W. B. Faris (Eds.), *Magical realism: Theory, history, community* (pp. 163–190). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Flores, A. (1955). Magical realism in Spanish American fiction. *Hispania*, 38(2), 187–192.
- García Márquez, G. (1967). *One hundred years of solitude*. New York, NY: Harper.
- García Márquez, G. (1972). A very old man with enormous wings. In *Leaf storm and other stories* (pp. 105–112). New York, NY: Harper and Row.
- García Márquez, G. (1981). *Chronicle of a death foretold*. New York, NY: Knopf.
- Hermann-Wilmarth, J. M., & Ryan, C. L. (2016). Destabilizing the homonormative for young readers: Exploring Tash's queerness in Jacqueline Woodson's *After Tupac and D Foster*. In D. Linville & D. L. Carlson (Eds.), *Beyond borders: Queer eros and ethos (ethics) in LGBTQ young adult literature* (pp. 85–99). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Killerman, S. (2013, May 3). *Understanding the complexities of gender* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NRcPXtdKjE>.
- Latham, D. (2007). The cultural work of magical realism in three young adult novels. *Children's Literature in Education*, 38(1), 59–70.
- Lo, M. (2014). *2014 YA by the numbers*. Retrieved from www.malindalo.com/blog/2014/12/2014-lgbt-ya-by-the-numbers.
- McLemore, A. (2016). *When the moon was ours*. New York, NY: Thomas Dunne.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2016). *Digest of education statistics, 2016, table 203.50*. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coc/indicator_cge.asp#.
- Rosenblatt, L. M. (1978). *The reader, the text, the poem: The transactional theory of the literary work*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Rudge, I. (2006). Magic realism in children's literature: A narratological reading. *New Review of Children's Literature and Libraryship*, 10(2), 127–140.
- Sáenz, B. A. (2012). *Aristotle and Dante discover the secrets of the universe*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Smith, L. J., & Herring, J. D. (1996). Literature alive: Connecting to story through the arts. *Reading Horizons*, 37(2), 102–115.
- Walton, L. (2014). *The strange and beautiful sorrows of Ava Lavender*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick.
- Warnes, C. (2005). Naturalizing the supernatural: Faith, irreverence, and magical realism. *Literature Compass*, 2(1), 1–16.
- Whitelaw, J. (2017). Arts-based literacy learning like “new school”: (Re)framing the arts in and of students' lives as story. *English Education*, 50(1), 42–71.

Afrofuturist Reading

Exploring Non-Western Depictions of Magical Worlds in *Akata Witch*

Rebecca G. Kaplan and Antero Garcia

At their best, YA science fiction and fantasy novels can reflect back hopeful journeys of human self-discovery. The memorable worlds of Hogwarts, of Narnia, and of Middle Earth reflect the goodness of humankind and offer pathways for social interactions for their readers. Simultaneously, they reflect the Eurocentric values and identities of the authors and presumed audiences for whom they are written (Garcia, 2013). Individualism, meritocracy, fame, and power all shine forth from the pages, elevating the white, straight, male protagonists who we root for as they find themselves and save the world.

Recognizing both the liberatory possibilities of fantasy novels and their all-too-frequently whitewashed cast of characters and tropes (Booth, de la Pena, Myers, Smith, & Yang, 2015), this chapter offers an exploration of non-Western fantasy through analyzing Nnedi Okorafor's (2011) YA novel *Akata Witch*. We highlight *Akata Witch* as an *afrofuturist* text, which teachers can use in the classroom as an entry point to teach students to use a *visionary fiction* lens, which engages fiction as a tool to "advance justice and liberation" (brown, 2017, p. 27). We see afrofuturism as a genre that enacts visionary fiction, which can transform reading into an act of imagining worlds and realities outside the status quo, paving the way for acts of both resistance and political engagement (Womack, 2013). In this chapter, we situate *Akata Witch* as an afrofuturist text for classroom use, introduce a visionary fiction lens for reading multicultural literature, and discuss key concepts to draw out within *Akata Witch* as a pathway toward imagining new possibilities for action within the real world. Through exploring non-Western depictions of magical worlds, this chapter builds on Okorafor's novel as an example of how fantasy and science fiction can expand thinking and guide civic engagement.

SITUATING *AKATA WITCH*

Akata Witch tells the story of pre-teen Sunny Nwazue. Sunny stands out from her classmates in Nigeria for two primary reasons. First, she was born in New

York City, so though her family is Nigerian, she speaks with an American accent and uses words like “soccer” instead of “football.” Second, though Sunny looks West African, she stands out because she is albino. Sunny discovers a third reason she is not like her classmates: she is a Leopard Person, someone with the ability to use magical powers.

It’s a story many YA and fantasy readers are familiar with: a bullied outcast discovers they have magical powers, engages in an intense process of learning and acquiring skills, and ultimately fights off a looming threat to the unaware mortal world. Though the fish-out-of-water sense of discovering a magical world thriving around her parallels the similar adventures of Harry Potter’s experiences in a muggle-filled world, Sunny’s lessons in magic are of a different variety. Developed and written from a non-Western perspective, the world that unfolds across *Akata Witch* is of a fundamentally different ontology.

Magic, or “juju,” in *Akata Witch* is “wild, alive, and enigmatic” (Okorafor, 2011, p. 1). Leopard People can learn juju, but they can never obtain absolute control over it. Exposure to the magical world includes exposure to violence, pain, and death. Even moments that are cause for celebration for a Leopard Person include some form of violence. Unlike the process of being chosen by a wand in Ollivanders wand shop in the wizarding world of Harry Potter, the way Sunny gets her juju knife is by putting her hand in a box of knives and getting cut by one of them. Teachers should bring awareness and intentionality when using *Akata Witch* in the classroom and considering the violence portrayed throughout the book, from bullying to depictions of death. Teaching through a visionary fiction lens can open critical discussions through examination of the portrayals of violence, magic, and other key topics within the book.

AFROFUTURIST TEXTS: LIBERATION THROUGH IMAGINATION

Afrofuturism, like juju in *Akata Witch*, is a dynamic concept that is hard to define. Reading afrofuturism can involve imagining a world in which our history of imperialism and colonialism did not occur. It can involve imagining that our current state of inequity cannot be the endpoint for humanity. It can involve imagining alternative realities and alternative futures and envisioning how to create them within our own homes, communities, and societies.

Womack (2013) defines afrofuturism as:

Both an artistic aesthetic and a framework for critical theory, Afrofuturism combines elements of science fiction, historical fiction, speculative fiction, fantasy, Afrocentricity, and magic realism with non-Western beliefs. In some cases, it’s a total reenvisioning of the past and speculation about the future rife with cultural critiques.

(p. 9)

There is a vibrant lineage of revolutionary black art that engages afrofuturism. Contemporary YA texts like *Akata Witch* link to works of past and present authors, artists, and musicians, including Octavia Butler, Sun Ra, Parliament, adrienne maree brown, and Janelle Monae, who, among others, have shifted genres through extending our collective imagination around the past, present, and future.

Activist and author adrienne maree brown (2017) describes how her first experience of living in the US when her father was stationed in Georgia, fraught with constant instantiations of racism, was a “foundational catalyst” for her study of science fiction. brown writes:

I thought then, and I think now: This can’t be all. No one survives this way, not long term. This can’t be the purpose of our species, to constantly identify each other as “other,” build walls between us, and engage in both formal and informal wars against each other’s bodies.

(p. 16)

brown describes discovering afrofuturist science fiction writer Octavia Butler’s work as life changing, as an articulation of “more viable futures.” Contemporary afrofuturist young adult texts, including the *Akata Witch* series (2011, 2017a), the *Binti* series (2015, 2017b, 2018), and the *Who Fears Death* (2010) series all by Nnedi Okorafor, and *Children of Blood and Bone* and the other texts within the *Legacy of Orisha* series (2018) by Tomi Adeyemi, present such alternative realities and futures.

Activist and artist Ingrid LaFleur (2017) intentionally links an afrofuturist vision of an American future to a necessary reckoning with systemic legacies of inequality:

The foundation of every institution—government, police, education, the museum—was built to silence, disallow, displace, and render powerless Black Americans. These institutions were never created for Black Americans to truly prosper.

(n.p.)

Afrofuturist texts, read through a visionary fiction lens, can allow teachers and students to engage in recognizing past and present systemic inequalities within literature and life, imagining alternative realities, and working toward better futures.

ENTERING AFROFUTURISM THROUGH WAKANDA

The film *Black Panther* (Coogler, 2018) can provide an entry point into afrofuturist texts for teachers who are unfamiliar with the genre. With record-breaking success at the box office, *Black Panther* is a “cultural and commercial milestone” (Cavna, 2018). In *Black Panther*, the fictional African nation Wakanda has flourished as it has stayed concealed from the horrors of colonialism and the

slave trade. Technologically advanced, with cultural traditions uninterrupted by imperialism, images of Wakanda open viewers' imaginations to envision what could be if history were rewritten. Understanding *Black Panther* as an afrofuturist text can serve as an introduction to the genre, and the incredible success of the film establishes the interest and desire for the genre.

VISIONARY FICTION

Afrofuturist texts in classrooms open opportunities for expanding representation and extending imagination in ways that work toward a more just world. Still, we recognize that there is potential harm in appropriating afrofuturism, and therefore recommend teachers become familiar with and select afrofuturist texts, then explicitly teach a visionary fiction lens in order to engage with those and other texts. In describing visionary fiction, a term coined by Walidah Imarisha, brown (2017) writes:

Art is not neutral. It either upholds or disrupts the status quo, advancing or regressing justice. [. . .] It is our right and responsibility to write ourselves into the future. All organizing is science fiction. If you are shaping the future, you are a futurist. And visionary fiction is a way to practice the future in our minds, alone and together.

(p. 197)

Explicitly teaching students to understand reading as a tool for justice and liberation can open opportunities for civic engagement and using literacy as a tool to address inequity. Visionary fiction as a lens on *Akata Witch* can open doors for critical thinking and rich analysis.

DECENTERING THE WEST: USING A VISIONARY FICTION LENS ON *AKATA WITCH* IN THE LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOM

By comparing and contrasting how certain concepts are treated in *Akata Witch* and in other popular fantasy series, English language arts teachers and students can expand their perspectives on humanity and our relationships to ourselves and the broader world. The magical world that Sunny encounters can instigate classroom investigations into concepts such as the five that we detail below. Each of these concepts within the book can be surfaced as pathways toward imagining new possibilities for action within the real world.

(Dis)ability

Leopard People can access powers from the magical world, which they refer to as the wilderness, through the use of juju knives, powders, or charms. But Leopard People also have magical abilities that connect to their own unique

qualities, which Lambs (nonmagical people) would usually consider flaws. While nonmagical people are “on a constant, unrealistic, irrational, and unnatural quest for perfection” (p. 98), Leopard People know that understanding their imperfections allows them to access their exceptional gifts.

Using a visionary fiction lens on Okorafor’s imagining of magic abilities located in flaws opens possibilities for critical thinking akin to critical disability theory, which calls for a reading that locates the disability within culture, rather than an individual (e.g., deafness is not a disability within a community where everyone speaks sign language, see McDermott & Varenne, 1995). For instance, Orlu, one of Sunny’s Leopard friends and part of her coven, is dyslexic. In the Lamb world, Orlu’s dyslexia is seen as a disability. But in the Leopard world, Orlu’s dyslexia is the key to his gift: the ability to undo juju. Once Orlu’s Leopard teacher helps him to hone his magical gift, Orlu is able to read in the nonmagical world.

Drawing out the connection between flaws and power in *Akata Witch* can support a shift in ontology, which readers can connect to their own disabilities or challenges. Students can reframe their disabilities or challenges as sources of power through writing and speaking opportunities. Students can investigate examples of how their school policies or structures create disabilities and design alternatives for the school to take up. For instance, students might design bathroom signage that does not frame nonbinary or transgender as a disability. Through engaging with *Akata Witch* as an Afrofuturist reading, students can work to shift how culture locates disability within individuals.

Wealth

In the Leopard world, currency, called *Chitim*, is earned through gaining knowledge. The wealthiest Leopard People are therefore the most knowledgeable. Chichi, one of Sunny’s Leopard friends and part of her coven, lives with her mother in a tiny hut filled with books. The two are extremely knowledgeable and therefore have plenty of currency. But that wealth is used to buy more books to learn more, not for material comforts.

Using a visionary fiction lens on Okorafor’s imagining of wealth gained through knowledge opens possibilities for questioning what is viewed as capital within our culture. Students can reframe what they carry in abundance as forms of capital, challenging the ways in which mainstream culture defines wealth. Students can read Yosso’s (2005) article “Whose Culture Has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth” and write about the forms of cultural wealth they carry and value. This scholarly text—like *Akata Witch*—challenges dominant notions of wealth and capitalism, reframing the expertise, knowledge, and interests of students as valuable assets for transformative change. Students can design recommendations for the school to shift how cultural wealth is represented or supported by school rules, curriculum, images on the walls, and honors or awards.

Nature

Although animals appear in *Harry Potter* (Rowling, 1997) as pets or assistants who perform specific tasks for their owners, *Akata Witch* presents a world in which the natural world is impacted by, but autonomous from, the human world. For instance, when Sunny and her coven need light to make their way in a dark forest, they cast a spell to request light from lightning bugs, knowing it is the bugs' choice whether or not they comply with the request. Rather than caged animals that are trained to the whims of a human-centered society, Okorafor's novel demonstrates that humans and nonhumans—plants, animals, spirits—can live harmoniously; the decisions to act synergistically are not dictated by the humans of the novel.

Using a visionary fiction lens on Okorafor's imagining of the natural world as autonomous from the human world opens possibilities for understanding agency and consent. Like lightning bugs, mythical creatures, and even the protagonist of the book, students *choose* what they do, think, and engage in. This focus on youth autonomy and consent places conversations around agency, mutual respect, and collective liberation. Further, building off of the relationship to animals within the book, *Akata Witch* can foster conversations around recognizing that we live in what scholars call the “anthropocene” (e.g., Vince, 2014)—a period in our geological history in which the actions of humans play a primary role in shaping the environment. Connecting writing and discussions about the environment, consent, and collective action is a recognition that human agency at all scales has profoundly shaped how our world is understood; students can center their own agency in improving, healing, and liberating through interpreting this book from a visionary fiction lens.

Place

Notions of place are also transformed in the Leopard world, which readers discover along with Sunny. For instance, the Aha Coven (Sunny's group of Leopard friends) meets at their teacher's home for lessons in juju. Their teacher, Anatov, lives in a hut with an entrance reminiscent of swinging doors used to enter a western saloon. One door is labeled IN, while the other is labeled OUT. When Sunny notices that everyone uses the opposite door to the labels, her friend Orlu explains, “To him, his hut is *outside* the average rubbish-filled world . . . Only with reluctance does he leave” (p. 56).

If reading *Akata Witch* in a school within the United States, it is an unspoken given that the class is being held on stolen land. A recognition of the land on which we teach and the myriad silenced histories held within our sites of learning is a first step to decentering colonial, Western notions of concepts like home and territory. Further, reimagining what is “In” or “Out” from an ontological and afrofuturist stance means encouraging students to engage in local research, understanding who else has lived on this now-occupied land

and considering opportunities for brokering awareness with classmates, family members, and the community. Similarly, recognizing the diverse backgrounds that every student possesses, this decentered reading within *Akata Witch* can allow teachers to guide their class to reinterpret colonial narratives within their communities and within their schooling.

Collectivity

Although we are used to reading about exceptional individuals like “the boy who lived” in *Harry Potter*, *Akata Witch* presents a collectivist ontology that does not value individuals in ways we have come to expect in fantasy series. For instance, the elders tell the Aha Coven that “More is at stake than your lives” (p. 310). The elders do not believe it is their job to protect the young Leopard People—they have a larger lens on the balance of the world that does not see individuals or small groups as essential to that balance.

Using a visionary fiction lens to interpret the collectivist views of Leopard People in *Akata Witch* opens possibilities for understanding collaborative, rather than competitive, ways of being and organizing in communities and societies. Students can learn about *biomimicry*, the creation of solutions for human problems based on imitating systems in nature. There are many examples of complex collaborative cultures in nature that thrive (e.g., mushrooms, dandelions, ants). Biomimicry includes “taking a design challenge and then finding an ecosystem that has already solved that challenge, and literally trying to emulate what you learn” (Benyus, quoted in Brown, 2017, p. 46). Students can look up examples of challenges solved through biomimicry and/or engage in design challenges themselves. Whether students are interested in addressing issues within school or society, they can consider benefits of, and barriers to, collectivist solutions for their designs.

MAKING MAGIC MATTER: INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR THE CLASSROOM

Whether ELA teachers choose to guide comparison through showing selected movie scenes, using a second shared-reading companion text, or having students select fantasy texts for independent reading, there are ample opportunities to expand ontological thinking through examining how Okorafor’s novel makes Western notions of magic, conflict, and resolution unfamiliar.

One way to approach teaching *Akata Witch* is to engage in an ongoing compare-and-contrast process using *Harry Potter* scenes from the films and/or books. Teachers might use an essential question to drive inquiry, such as: *How can comparing themes and scenes from Akata Witch and Harry Potter support discovering ways to use fiction as a tool for justice and liberation?* Teachers might also consider having students keep an ongoing chart as they read, tracking themes such as those listed above (see Table 18.1).

■ **TABLE 18.1** Chart for students to track thinking (use expandable Google document or large chart paper)

Theme	Quote	What this quote makes me think about	How this theme compares/contrasts with <i>Harry Potter</i>
(Dis)ability			
Wealth			
Nature			
Place			
Collectivity			

CONCLUSION

For all of us aspiring to be *critical educators*, reading more afrofuturist texts is a must. Teachers might search online for book lists; some starting places include “Nine Afrofuturist Books to Enjoy If You’re Homesick for Wakanda” (London, 2018) and “Defining the Genre: 7 Novels of Afrofuturism” (Alspach, 2016). They might read afrofuturist novels by authors of color, such as Octavia E. Butler, NK Jemisin, and Nalo Hopkinson. If teachers are wanting to stay within the YA genre, they might start by reading all of the young adult volumes by Nnedi Okorafor (she has many) and Tomi Adeyemi’s *Children of Blood and Bone*. As teachers read afrofuturist texts, they might talk to their colleagues and students about them, carry the books with them in the halls, and add those that they finish to their classroom libraries.

When teachers are reading texts with their students that are not afrofuturist texts, they might bring a visionary fiction lens to the reading. Along with their students, they might inquire into how the texts can be read as tools for justice and liberation. What pathways are the texts giving, and what is missing? The *Harry Potter* series has much to say about justice, from the ongoing World War II allegory to the poignant depictions of education reform. However, what is missing when such lessons on justice and liberation are carried out almost entirely by a cast of white, heterosexual characters? When reading multicultural texts in the classroom, teachers might investigate with their students the opportunities for justice within the setting of the book. Are there ways to envision something better than what is? Is there an acknowledgment of how

history connects to the characters' challenges and opportunities? How does imagination play a role in the character's story?

There are existing studies on YA's connection to activism such as the Harry Potter Alliance (Kligler-Vilenchik, 2013), which is an example of readers using their fandom to assemble for real campaigns. We are excited about the possibilities that can arise when the fandom at the center of the action values collectivism and other ontological shifts away from Western ideology. What does an *Akata Witch* Alliance look like? We've seen actions arise through *Black Panther* fandom that reflect charity approaches (e.g., famous actors or athletes renting out whole movie theaters to bring classrooms, schools, and communities to see the movie). While these actions are exciting and pull on our heart strings, do they work to advance justice and liberation?

We've also seen political actions arise through *Black Panther* fandom. For instance, the #WakandaTheVote initiative, led by the Electoral Justice Project, has been registering voters standing in line to see *Black Panther*. In an interview, the initiative's founders explained:

We know that for some it's a superhero world, but we know that the world we deserve is still waiting to be built—and we want to build it! This upcoming spring and November 2018 midterm elections are an important step in building that new world, and we want to take every opportunity to engage our communities in the conversation of electoral justice.

(Helm, 2018, n.p.)

This political action utilizing fandom to register voters is effective and creative. It's clear that the initiative's founders are aiming to advance justice and liberation, yet the action is rooted in the current unjust system.

What will it take to work toward justice and liberation? If teachers are reading *Engaging with Multicultural YA Literature in the Secondary Classroom: Critical Approaches for Critical Educators*, they likely see the classroom as a space for action and reading as a tool for creating a world beyond our collective imagination. Reading afrofuturist texts and teaching with a visionary fiction lens can support these goals; *Akata Witch* can support readers to see beyond Western conceptualizations of them.

SEE ALSO

Adeyemi, T. (2018). *Children of blood and bone*. New York, NY: Henry Holt. Zélie sets out on a quest to restore magic to Orisha, which vanished after the genocide of all the maji throughout the land. This incredible adventure is an imaginative, poignant afrofuturist text. It both reimagines a world which centers black culture and alludes to importance of the Black Lives Matter movement, making it a perfect afrofuturist text to read with a visionary fiction lens.

Butler, O.E. (1995). *Patternmaster*. New York, NY: Warner Books.

In the distant future, selective breeding has created a caste society in which people with psychic abilities rule above all others. This afrofuturist text, originally published in 1979, critiques colonialism through a reimagined past and future.

Rowling, J.K. (1997). *Harry Potter and the philosopher's stone*. London: Bloomsbury.

Harry Potter discovers he has magical powers and lineage and attends Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry to hone his wizarding skills. While *Harry Potter* isn't an afrofuturist text, we suggest reading Eurocentric fantasy texts with a visionary fiction lens as well. Comparing these texts to afrofuturist texts will support a dynamic vision of justice.

REFERENCES

- Adeyemi, T. (2018). *Children of blood and bone*. New York, NY: Henry Holt.
- Alspach, A. (2016). *Defining the genre: 7 novels of Afrofuturism*. B&N Sci Fi and Fantasy Blog. Retrieved from www.barnesandnoble.com/blog/sci-fi-fantasy/defining-the-genre-7-novels-of-afrofuturism.
- Booth, C., de la Pena, M., Myers, W. D., Smith, C. L., & Yang, G. L. (2015). Race matters: A collaborative conversation. *The ALAN Review*, 42(2), 8–14.
- brown, a. m. (2017). *Emergent strategy: Shaping change, changing worlds*. Chicago, CA: AK Press.
- Cavna, M. (2018). “Black Panther” is so huge, it just had the biggest Monday take. Ever. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from www.washingtonpost.com/news/comic-riffs/wp/2018/02/20/black-panther-is-so-huge-it-just-had-the-biggest-monday-take-ever/?utm_term=.4ade6bf65cce.
- Coogler, R. (2018). *Black Panther* [Motion picture]. Burbank, CA: Marvel Studios.
- Garcia, A. (2013). *Critical foundations in young adult literature: Challenging genres*. Rotterdam, NY: Sense.
- Helm, A. (2018). *Black Panther* begets political action beyond the big screen. *The Root*. Retrieved from www.theroot.com/black-panther-begets-political-action-beyond-the-big-sc-1823101222.
- Kligler-Vilenchik, N. (2013). “Decreasing world suck”: *Fan communities, mechanisms of translation, and participatory politics*. University of Southern California, Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism.
- LaFleur, I. (2017). *Plan of action*. Retrieved from: <http://ingridlafleur.com/new-page-1/>.
- London, D. (2018). Nine afrofuturist books to enjoy if you're homesick for Wakanda. *Electric Lit*. Retrieved from <https://electriclitterature.com/9-afrofuturist-books-to-enjoy-if-youre-homesick-for-wakanda-ebb591cd9e53>.
- McDermott, R., & Varenne, H. (1995). Culture as disability. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 26, 324–348.
- Okorafor, N. (2010). *Who fears death*. New York, NY: Penguin.
- Okorafor, N. (2011). *Akata witch*. New York, NY: Speak.
- Okorafor, N. (2015). *Binti*. New York, NY: Tor.

- Okorafor, N. (2017a). *Akata warrior*. New York, NY: Viking.
- Okorafor, N. (2017b). *Home*. New York, NY: Tor.
- Okorafor, N. (2018). *The night masquerade*. New York, NY: Tor.
- Rowling, J. K. (1997). *Harry Potter and the philosopher's stone*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Vince, G. (2014). *Adventures in the anthropocene: A journey to the heart of the planet we made*. New York, NY: Milkweed Press.
- Womack, Y. L. (2013). *Afrofuturism: The world of black sci-fi and fantasy culture*. Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press.
- Yosso, T. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 69–91.



Conclusion

Recognizing and Speaking to the Challenges that Come with Courageous Teaching

Wendy J. Glenn and Ricki Ginsberg

The chapters across this volume offer rich, varied, and innovative opportunities for incorporating multicultural young adult literature into classroom spaces. They introduce us to stories that evoke deeply felt emotion, challenge us to see in new and sometimes difficult ways, and inspire us to both reconsider what we know and fight to create space for ways of knowing that have been historically marginalized and/or silenced. The chapters ground these stories in theories that give rise to instructional approaches and practices that can help us work with students to read and think critically and with care.

We recognize, however, that there are challenges that come with choosing and teaching the titles contained in this volume. As social institutions, schools carry the weight of systems and structures designed to maintain the status quo, and the influence of these forces is felt by teachers and students in the work they do together and independently each day. Courageous educators who center their curricular decisions, teaching practices, and relationship-building with students on equity and justice in an attempt to challenge institutional norms sometimes find themselves on the defensive and having to fight battles that demand advocacy approaches not always present or modeled in the process of teacher training.

For educators wanting to create space for these titles and instructional practices in their classrooms and schools but who are facing opposition, we close this volume with a discussion of potential challenges commonly associated with this work and how to navigate them.

CHALLENGE: WE'RE NOT FAMILIAR WITH MULTICULTURAL TITLES FOR YOUNG ADULT READERS.

This one is easy! This book contains descriptions of over 50 multicultural titles for young adult readers that could be incorporated into—or inspire the revision of—existing curricula. Educators in search of additional suggestions might explore the following online resources.

Booklists

- Américas Award Winners (<http://claspprograms.org/americasaward>)
- Arab American Book Award Winners (www.arabamericanmuseum.org/bookaward)
- Asian Pacific American Libraries Association Award Winners (www.apalaweb.org/)
- Barahona Center (Titles in Spanish) (https://primo-pmtna01.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/primo-explore/search?institution=CALS_USM&vid=CALS_USM&tab=csusm_books&search_scope=barahona&onCampus=false&query=any,contains,a&indx=1&bulkSize=20&dym=true&highlight=true&displayField=title&sortBy=rank&lang=en_US&facet=rtype,include,books)
- Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) Multicultural Booklists (<https://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/multicultural.asp>)
- Coretta Scott King Book Award Winners (www.ala.org/emiert/cskbookawards)
- Jane Addams Children's Book Award Winners (www.janeaddamschildrensbookaward.org/)
- Lambda Literary Award Winners (www.lambdaliterary.org/complete-list-of-award-recipients/)
- Native American Youth Services Literature Award Winners (<http://ailanet.org/>)
- Pura Belpré Award Winners (www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/belpremedal)
- The Rainbow List (<http://glbtrt.ala.org/rainbowbooks/archives/1103>)
- Schneider Family Book Award Winners (www.ala.org/awardsgrants/schneider-family-book-award)
- Stonewall Book Award Winners (www.ala.org/awardsgrants/stonewall-book-awards-mike-morgan-larry-romans-children%E2%80%99s-young-adult-literature-award)
- Tomás Rivera Mexican American Book Award Winners (<http://rivera-bookaward.org/>)
- Under the Radar (Titles from smaller presses) (www.alan-ya.org/publications/under-the-radar-2/)
- We Need Diverse Books (<http://weneeddiversebooks.org/>)

Review and Resource Blogs and Other Sites of Potential Interest

- 1000 Black Girl Books Resource Guide (<http://grassrootscommunityfoundation.org/1000-black-girl-books-resource-guide/>)
- American Indians in Children's Literature (<https://americanindiansinchildrensliterature.blogspot.com/>)
- Colorín Colorado (www.colorincolorado.org/books-authors/multicultural-literature)

Cynthia Leitch Smith's Resources Pages (<http://cynthialeitchsmith.com/>)
 The Dark Fantastic (<http://thedarkfantastic.blogspot.com/>)
 Disability in Kidlit (<http://disabilityinkidlit.com/>)
 Diverse Kid Lit Blog Hop (www.thelogonauts.com/)
 Fledgling (<https://zettaelliott.wordpress.com/2011/11/20/2011-african-american-ya-mg-novels/>)
 GayYA (www.gayya.org/?page_id=40)
 Latinxs in Kid Lit (<https://latinosinkidlit.com/>)
 Oyate (www.oyate.org/)
 Rich in Color (www.richincolor.com)
 Unleashing Readers (www.unleashingreaders.com/)

CHALLENGE: AS CULTURAL OUTSIDERS, THESE TITLES FALL OUTSIDE OUR EXPERIENCES AND EXPERTISE; WE CANNOT SPEAK FOR OR REPRESENT THESE CULTURES ACCURATELY.

That's okay. Educators should not speak for or attempt to represent cultures to which they do not belong. Instead, teachers can be honest with students about their professional commitment to bringing diverse voices into the classroom and the reality that they might not fully understand the cultures and communities contained in the stories they choose to teach. Such an approach might require a fundamental shift in the construction of what it means to be a teacher. Rather than holding a view of the teacher as expert, educators might need to allow themselves to be vulnerable in the recognition that they are learners as much as they are teachers—and that their students might possess this dual role as well.

The process of building new conceptions of the teacher as partner could begin with deep reflection and critique of teachers' own schooling experiences and those forwarded in the social narrative of teachers and teaching. Educators might look, for example, to the work of Buchanan (2015) to think about their professional selves, particularly how they might recognize and draw upon professional agency to negotiate new roles for themselves that resist external attempts to position them in particular ways. Educators might also draw upon Yu, Johnson, Deutsch, and Varga's (2018) work to consider the importance of teacher noticing and teacher investment and how teacher-student interactions that fulfill adolescents' developmental needs of autonomy, competence, and connection by honoring student perspectives can promote positive youth development—and build stronger classroom communities. And the work of Dutta et al. (2016) could provide a powerful opportunity for teachers to reconsider their views on community and consider how a pedagogy of discomfort can invite educators and students to "enter and critically engage with difficult and discomfiting spaces that are systematically unacknowledged or silenced in the classroom . . . [and] imagine more radically inclusive possibilities in the classroom" (p. 345).

**CHALLENGE: EVEN IF WE DID DECIDE
TO TEACH THESE BOOKS, WE DON'T KNOW
HOW TO TALK ABOUT THE ISSUES THEY
RAISE, PARTICULARLY THOSE THAT CENTER
ON RACE. THIS IS SUCH A TOUCHY SUBJECT.**

We believe that schools are the most ideal spaces for addressing what might be considered “touchy” subjects, particularly given our belief that one aim of schooling is to invite young people to engage with critical democracy as they prepare to accept the rights and responsibilities of adult citizenship. Classrooms can serve as spaces which expose students to a variety of perspectives, provide them with historical and contemporary context around persistent social and political tensions, help them grapple with the complexities inherent in these tensions, and ultimately come to recognize that they must have deeply understood and critically examined reasons for believing what they believe, as their decisions—voting and otherwise—impact the lived experiences of others.

Given the continued existence of racial violence in the United States, we do not believe we have been successful in helping students face, talk about, understand, or develop tools to mediate conflict around race. By choosing to ignore race and racism in schools and classrooms, whether out of fear or lack of perceived responsibility, we give inaccurate and often hate-filled rhetoric space to flourish unchallenged in ways that ultimately undermine our democratic aims and ask people who experience marginalization and oppression to carry the resulting burden. Yes, conversations about race can inspire discomfort in educators, particularly those whose racial identities are affirmed by dominant cultural norms, but silencing such conversations fails to serve students in ways that extend well beyond the classroom walls.

For educators striving to learn more about how to do this work well, we offer the following resources:

Teaching Tolerance: Teaching about Race, Racism, and Police Violence
(www.tolerance.org/moment/racism-and-police-violence)

The New York Times: First Encounters with Race and Racism: Teaching Ideas for Classroom Conversations
(www.nytimes.com/2017/09/27/learning/lesson-plans/first-encounters-with-race-and-racism-teaching-ideas-for-classroom-conversations.html)

California Newsreel Documentary Series: *Race: The Power of an Illusion*
(www.pbs.org/race/000_General/000_00-Home.htm)

CHALLENGE: THESE BOOKS ARE GREAT, BUT SOME INTRODUCE TOPICS LIKE SEXUALITY AND VIOLENCE, TOPICS THAT MIGHT BE UNACCEPTABLE TO ADULTS IN OUR COMMUNITY; WE DON'T KNOW THAT WE CAN USE THESE TITLES IN OUR CLASSROOMS OR SCHOOL DUE TO CENSORSHIP CONCERNS.

As aligned with the comments above, classroom spaces—and the books we offer students within them—offer opportunities for complicated and necessary conversations. It is true that the novels contained in this collection might leave readers shaken. However, these stories are not gratuitous but gratifying in the way they ask readers to think carefully about what they believe and to develop a more complex, reasoned understanding of the world. They demonstrate a trust in adolescents, young readers who have the capacity and deserve the chance to examine their visions of self and others and try to make sense of issues that matter—even, especially, those that might be easier to ignore.

Educators who aim to use these texts might prepare for potential challenges by reviewing the American Library Association lists of the most frequently challenged books each year (www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/frequentlychallengedbooks), reviewing the Guidelines for Dealing with Censorship of Published Materials created by the National Council of Teachers of English (www2.ncte.org/statement/censorshipofnonprint/), and exploring rationales for teaching commonly challenged texts in consideration of generating a similar document centered on the selected title (www.ncte.org/action/anti-censorship/rationales).

To broaden this exploration and invite students to consider their own rights and responsibilities as readers of these novels, educators might explore the resources provided by the National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC), a coalition comprising 50 national not-for-profit organizations (including NCTE, ALA, and ILA) working together to protect First Amendment rights. The organization's website (<https://ncac.org/>) includes information on the Kids' Right to Read project, sponsored by the Youth Free Expression program and created to provide information, research, and advocacy related to free speech, copyright, and media democracy issues, including restrictions on publicly funded expression in libraries and schools and censorship intended to shield children from information and ideas.

We are grateful to the contributors of this volume for describing several innovative approaches for bringing truly excellent multicultural YA literature into classrooms. We hope that readers find a way into this work, locating in themselves the courage and commitment necessary to teaching them well and locating in their students an engaged willingness to connect, to critique, and to co-construct through stories that demand and deserve to be heard.

REFERENCES

- Buchanan, R. (2015). Teacher identity and agency in an era of accountability. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 21(6), 700–719.
- Dutta, U., Shroll, T., Engelsens, J., Prickett, S., Hajjar, L., & Green, J. (2016). The “messiness” of teaching/learning social (in)justice: Performing a pedagogy of discomfort. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 22(5), 345–352.
- Yu, M. V. B., Johnson, H. E., Deutsch, N. L., & Varga, S. M. (2018). “She calls me by my last name”: Exploring adolescent perceptions of positive teacher-student relationships. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 33(3), 332–362.



Acknowledgments

This book would not exist were it not for the pre-service teachers who regularly inspire us to want to do better and be better. Their strong interest in building critical classroom spaces moved us to develop this book in hopes that it will inspire others, as well.

For the authors who write multicultural young adult texts, thank you for your work and for inspiring us all.

Thank you to the contributors within this book. We are proud to work by your side and to call you colleagues and friends.

Thank you to reviewers for reading the several dozen chapter proposals and giving us invaluable feedback: Jacqueline Bach, Steven Bickmore, Robert Bittner, James Blasingame, Carlin Borsheim-Black, Shanetia Clark, Kelly Cyr, Arianna Drossopoulous, Sybil Durand, Toby Emert, Scott Filkins, Tracey Flores, Courtney Johnson, Chloe Kannon, Danielle King-Watkins, Renee Stites Kruep, Maggie Stevens Lopez, Victor Malo-Juvera, Lauren Midgette, Donalyn Miller, Kellee Moye, Ashley Hope Pérez, Daria Plumb, Travis Reyes, Jennifer Shettel, Emma Smith, Victoria Ford Smith, and Elizabeth Stagis.

We are grateful for the team at Routledge. Karen Adler, your excitement for our proposal made us even more excited about our project. Siobhan Murphy, thank you for your quick responses to our many questions. Autumn Spalding, thank you for serving as our project manager and for your kindness. We are also grateful for the people who worked behind the scenes at Routledge to copyedit, typeset, and market the book. We appreciate you.

And to our families, we won't pretend that the publication of this book means that we won't keep "talking shop" during our dual family gatherings. Thank you for always supporting us in our work—for traveling across the country so we could pursue the jobs of our dreams. We are eternally grateful for you.



Editors and Contributors

EDITORS

Ricki Ginsberg, Assistant Professor of English Education, Colorado State University Ricki Ginsberg teaches courses in reading and writing pedagogies, teaching and research methods, and young adult literature. Her research interests include educational equity, teacher education, multicultural young adult literature, culturally responsive pedagogies, the recruitment of teachers of color, and multiracial identities. She is Assistant Editor of *The ALAN Review*, President-Elect for the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English (ALAN), and Director of the Diverse Leadership in Education program at her university. Her work has been published in *Research in the Teaching of English*, *Teachers College Record*, *Journal of Adolescent Research*, *Multicultural Perspectives*, *Journal of Human Rights*, *English Journal*, *Voices from the Middle*, and *The ALAN Review*.

Wendy J. Glenn, Professor of Literacy Studies, University of Colorado Boulder Wendy J. Glenn is Professor of Literacy Studies, Co-Director of Teacher Education, and Chair of Secondary Humanities in the School of Education at the University of Colorado Boulder. She teaches courses in the theories and methods of teaching literature, writing, and language. Dr. Glenn was named a University Teaching Fellow at the University of Connecticut in 2009 and Fulbright Scholar to Norway in 2009–2010. Her research centers on literature and literacies for young adults, particularly in the areas of socio-cultural analyses and critical pedagogy. She is the former President of the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English (ALAN) and current Senior Editor of the organization's peer-review journal, *The ALAN Review*.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTORS

Christina Marie Ashwin, PhD Candidate, University of Pittsburgh Christina Ashwin is an advanced doctoral candidate at the University of Pittsburgh's

School of Education's Department of Instruction and Learning. Before pursuing her doctorate in Language, Literacy, and Culture, Christina received a Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology and History and Master of Arts in Teaching from the University of Pittsburgh. In addition, she taught secondary Social Studies for seven years at both an urban charter high school in downtown Pittsburgh, PA, and briefly at a private Dutch international secondary school in Hsinchu, Taiwan. Christina has four years of experience supervising and teaching intern teachers through the University of Pittsburgh's Social Studies Master of Arts in Teaching program. Christina's research interests center around investigating white teachers' understandings of race and racism. In the summer of 2018 Christina successfully defended her dissertation titled, "Beyond 'Talking Different': White Pre-service Teachers' Critical Race Talk about Teaching Dialect Diversity."

Mollie V. Blackburn, Professor in Teaching and Learning, The Ohio State University Mollie Blackburn's research focuses on literacy, language, and social change, with particular attention to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth and the teachers who serve them. She is the author of *Interrupting Hate: Homophobia in Schools and What Literacy Can Do about It*, a co-author of *Stepping Up!: Teachers Advocating for Sexual and Gender Diversity in Schools*, and a co-editor of *Acting Out!: Combating Homophobia through Teacher Activism*. She has received WILLA's Inglis Award for her work in the areas of gender, sexuality, sexual orientation, and young people; the Queer Studies special interest group of the AERA's award for a body of work; and the Alan C. Purves Award for an article in *Research in the Teaching of English* deemed rich with implications for classroom practice.

Jennifer Buehler, Associate Professor of English Education, Saint Louis University Jennifer Buehler is Associate Professor of English Education at Saint Louis University where she teaches courses on young adult literature, writing pedagogy, urban education, and ethnography. Buehler is the former host of Text Messages, a monthly young adult literature podcast sponsored by ReadWriteThink.org; a past President of ALAN, the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English; and the author of *Teaching Reading with YA Literature: Complex Texts, Complex Lives* (NCTE, 2016). Jennifer received her PhD from the Joint Program in English Education at the University of Michigan after spending ten years as a high school English teacher. She received the NCTE Promising Researcher Award for her ethnographic work on urban school culture.

Alyssa Chrisman, PhD Student in Teaching and Learning, The Ohio State University Alyssa is a doctoral student at The Ohio State University in Literature for Children and Young Adults with a Graduate Interdisciplinary Specialization in Disability Studies. She received her MA in Literature for Children and Young Adults in the Department of Teaching and Learning at

The Ohio State University and her BSEd in English and Speech from Central Michigan University. Prior to graduate school, she was a secondary educator in Memphis, TN. Her research interests include representations of mental illness in young adult and children's literature, the relationship between happiness/wellness and social justice, and the development of critical literacy in pre-service language arts teachers.

Chonika Coleman-King, Assistant Professor of Urban Multicultural Education, University of Tennessee Dr. Chonika Coleman-King prepares pre-service teachers and interns to teach with an emphasis on social justice in schools that serve children of color, ethnically and linguistically minoritized groups, and economically disadvantaged students. Her research interests include the development of culturally responsive and anti-racist teachers, urban education, and the experiences of black immigrant and black American youth in US schools. Dr. Coleman-King is the author of *The (Re-)Making of a Black American: Tracing the Racial and Ethnic Socialization of Caribbean American Youth*.

Sean P. Connors, Associate Professor of English Education, University of Arkansas Sean Connors is an Associate Professor of English Education at the University of Arkansas. His scholarship and teaching focuses on the application of diverse critical perspectives to young adult literature. He is the editor of *The Politics of Panem: Challenging Genres* (2014), and the recipient of the 2018 Divergent Award for Excellence in 21st Century Literacies. Sean is the host of *The Storyteller's Thread*, a monthly podcast devoted to young adult literature.

Patricia E. Enciso, Professor of Literature for Children and Young Adults, The Ohio State University Professor Enciso's research is informed by sociocultural, poststructural, anti-racist, and critical theories of literacy, literature, and storytelling and engages middle-school youth in the production and interpretation of their own and others' storyworlds. Professor Enciso is Past President of the Literacy Research Association and has served as chair and board member of the NCTE Research Foundation (2002–2005). She is co-editor of *Reframing Sociocultural Theory in Literacy Research: Identity, Agency, and Power* (2007), co-editor of *The Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature* (2010), and her most recent research is published in *English Teaching: Practice and Critique* (2016) and the *Journal of Literacy Research* (2017).

Sarah Bradford Fletcher, PhD Student, The Ohio State University Sarah Bradford Fletcher is a doctoral student specializing in Literature for Children and Young Adults in the Department of Teaching and Learning at The Ohio State University, where she teaches undergraduate courses in children's and young adult literature. She earned her MA in Drama, Language, Literature, and Reading from The Ohio State University and has also spent time working

as a classroom English teacher at both the middle and high school levels. Her research interests include pre-service teacher interactions with narratives for youth, specifically focusing on conversations around sexual violence and trauma in young adult literature.

Antero Garcia, Assistant Professor, Graduate School of Education, Stanford University Antero Garcia is an Assistant Professor in the Graduate School of Education at Stanford University where he studies how technology and gaming shape both youth and adult learning, literacy practices, and civic identities. Prior to completing his PhD, Antero was an English teacher at a public high school in South Central Los Angeles. His most recent research studies explore learning and literacies in tabletop role-playing games *Dungeons & Dragons* and how participatory culture shifts classroom relationships and instruction. Antero received his PhD in the Urban Schooling division of the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Karly Marie Grice, Assistant Professor of English, Millikin University Karly Marie Grice is an Assistant Professor of English and the English Education Coordinator at Millikin University. She received her PhD in Literature for Children and Young Adults at The Ohio State University and has taught courses in composition, children's literature, adolescent literature, and ELA methods. She has published works mostly on multicultural comics and young adult literature which have appeared in *The ALAN Review*, *English Journal*, and *Red Feather Journal* as well as the edited collection *Graphic Novels for Children and Young Adults*. Prior to graduate school, Karly taught high school English for four years.

Susan L. Groenke, Professor of English Education and Children's and Young Adult Literature, University of Tennessee A former nationally board-certified middle and high school ELA teacher, Dr. Susan Groenke now directs the English Education MA program and the Children's and Young Adult Literature PhD program at the University of Tennessee. Dr. Groenke is also Director of the Center for Children's and Young Adult Literature. Dr. Groenke prepares pre-service teachers to advocate for multicultural young adult literature in the secondary ELA classroom, and to interrogate whiteness in secondary English canonical texts and curriculum. Her research interests include the development of anti-racist teachers, and youths' multiple and varied motivations for reading young adult literature. With Lisa Scherff, Dr. Groenke co-authored the NCTE publication, *Teaching YAL through Differentiated Instruction*.

Rebecca G. Kaplan, Library Information Specialist, Summit Middle School Rebecca G. Kaplan supports students and teachers as a library information specialist in a middle school library. She received her PhD in Education

from the University of Colorado Boulder. She loves teaching and has taught middle school language arts, high school English, university undergraduates in teacher education and community-based leadership, and inservice teachers in cross-content approaches to literacy. She works with researchers and teachers to design, implement, and evaluate educator professional development, innovative curriculum, civic engagement initiatives, and participatory research.

Cammie Kim Lin, Adjunct Assistant Professor of English Education and Writing, New York University Cammie Kim Lin worked as a New York City public school teacher and literacy coach before completing her doctoral work in English Education at Teachers College, Columbia University. She currently teaches English methods and young adult literature courses in the NYU Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development, as well as courses in the first-year writing program in Liberal Studies. Her research interests include young adult literature, mixed-race/-ethnicity/-culture studies, queer literacy pedagogy, and ESL students in the college writing classroom. She is the author of numerous publications, including work that has been published in academic journals such as *English Education*, *The ALAN Review*, *The Bank Street Occasional Paper Series*, and the edited collection *Pedagogies of Kindness and Respect: On the Lives and Education of Children* (Peter Lang, 2015).

Angel Daniel Matos, Assistant Professor of English and Comparative Literature, San Diego State University Angel Daniel Matos is an Assistant Professor of English and Comparative Literature at San Diego State University who specializes in children's and young adult fiction, queer studies, and screen cultures. His primary research examines how queer emotions, histories, and spaces are shaped and narrativized in 21st-century young adult texts and media. His work has been published in academic journals such as *Children's Literature*, *The ALAN Review*, *QED: A Journal of GLBTQ Worldmaking*, and *Queer Studies in Media and Popular Culture*, and in edited collections such as *Gendered Identities: Critical Rereadings of Gender in Children's and Young Adult Literature* (Routledge, 2016) and *MLA Options for Teaching Young Adult Literature* (MLA, in press).

Mary Catherine Miller, Director of Academic Success and Innovation, Boys & Girls Clubs of Columbus Mary Catherine Miller works as the Director of Academic Success and Innovation for the Boys & Girls Clubs of Columbus, where she manages projects and engages in research related to afterschool literacy programming and school and community partnerships. She received her PhD in Literature for Children and Young Adults in the Department of Teaching at Learning at The Ohio State University, where she taught courses in children's literature and young adult literature. She has published on arts-based pedagogies and children's literature in *Studies in Art Education* and on trans YA literature in *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature*. In addition to multimodal reader response, her research interests include

out-of-school literacy practices, fan culture, and LGBTQ children's and YA literature.

Caitlin E. Murphy, PhD Candidate, The Ohio State University Caitlin E. Murphy is a doctoral candidate in the Literature for Children and Young Adults program at The Ohio State University and has taught courses in adolescent literature, reading foundations, new media studies, and reading across the curriculum. She earned her M.Ed. from Wake Forest University. Before working on her PhD, Caitlin taught English for eight years both at a rural high school in Kentucky and at a suburban high school in northern Virginia. Her research focuses on relationships of care between teachers and students and the role literature plays in eliciting those exchanges, youth incarceration, and humanizing pedagogies in the English classroom.

Rachel L. Rickard Rebellino, PhD Candidate, The Ohio State University Rachel L. Rickard Rebellino is a doctoral candidate specializing in Literature for Children and Young Adults in the Department of Teaching and Learning at The Ohio State University. She received her MA in Children's Literature from Eastern Michigan University and has taught courses in composition and children's and young adult literature. Her research focuses on narrative form in youth literature, girlhood studies, and the role of children's and young adult literature in facilitating conversations around equity and social justice. Her work has been published in *The ALAN Review*, *English Journal*, and *The Lion and the Unicorn* as well as in the edited collection *Graphic Novels for Children and Young Adults* (University Press of Mississippi, 2017).

Sophia Tatiana Sarigianides, Associate Professor of English Education, Westfield State University Sophia Tatiana Sarigianides's research focuses on the role of conceptions of adolescence in teacher thinking and in representations of youth in young adult literature, representations of racial and ethnic losses in young adult literature, as well as preparing teachers to address racism via literary study in white-dominant schools. She is the co-author of *Rethinking "the adolescent" in Adolescent Literacy*, and her journal publications include those in *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, *The ALAN Review*, *English Journal*, *Journal of Youth Studies*, *Curriculum Inquiry*, and *Educational Theory*.

Ryan Schey, Assistant Professor of English Education, Auburn University Ryan Schey is Assistant Professor of English Education at Auburn University. Previously, he completed his PhD in literacy education at The Ohio State University. His research explores literacy, language, and social change in schools, focusing on LGBTQ and gender diverse young people. Currently, he is working on analyzing data from a year-long literacy ethnography in an urban public comprehensive high school where he collaborated with a teacher in her English language arts classes and the school's Genders and Sexualities

Alliance. Before completing his doctorate, he taught high school English in central Ohio, co-advised his school's Gay-Straight Alliance, and participated in a local teacher inquiry group focused on combating homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism. He recently co-authored a monograph titled *Stepping Up!: Teachers Advocating for Sexual and Gender Diversity in Schools* with members of this inquiry group.

Renita R. Schmidt, Associate Professor in Elementary Education and Language, Literacy and Culture, University of Iowa Renita R. Schmidt is Associate Professor in Elementary Education and Language, Literacy and Culture in the College of Education at the University of Iowa. Her research and teaching focus on critical analysis of children's literature and the methods and materials elementary teachers use for literacy instruction. Her research has been published in journals including *Language Arts*, *Journal of Literacy Research*, *Journal of Language and Literacy Education*, *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, and *Voices from the Middle*. She is co-author of *21st Century Literacy* (with P.L. Thomas, Springer, 2009).

Nithya Sivashankar, PhD Candidate, The Ohio State University Nithya Sivashankar is a PhD candidate in the Literature for Children and Young Adults program with a Graduate Interdisciplinary Specialization in South Asian Studies. She has an MA in Writing for Children from the University of Central Lancashire, UK, and has worked as an editor at a children's publishing house in India. She was awarded the 2017–2018 Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop Scholarship for Research in Children's Literature. Her work on multicultural conflict narratives, dramatic inquiry, illustrated books, and narrative theory has appeared, or is forthcoming, in the journals *English Teaching: Practice and Critique* (2016) and *Research on Diversity in Youth Literature* (2019), and in edited collections such as *Literary Cultures and Twentieth Century Childhoods* and *Land of Opportunity: Immigrant Experiences in the North American Landscape*.

Christine N. Stamper, PhD Graduate, The Ohio State University Christine N. Stamper is a recent PhD from The Ohio State University in Literature for Children and Young Adults with a Graduate Interdisciplinary Specialization in Sexuality Studies. Her dissertation project studied award-winning LGBTQ-themed YA literature, looking at the identities and themes present to examine how these texts disrupt stereotypical narratives while also supporting oppressive tropes. Her article in *Children's Literature in Education* shows how the graphic memoir *Honor Girl* expands multiple traditions. Additionally, she has published a co-written article in *The English Journal* about the potential for nonprose multicultural texts in classrooms and another in *The ALAN Review* about Latina teenagers' relationships with their mothers in YA fiction.

Sara Studebaker, Secondary ELA Teacher, Propel Andrew Street High School Sara Studebaker is a secondary ELA teacher at Propel Andrew Street

High School in Pittsburgh, PA. Over the past ten years, Sara has taught in urban public and charter schools in both Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. Currently, she teaches American Literature and facilitates a year-long, student-led Senior Expedition. She strives to teach for social justice through standards-aligned instruction that is culturally relevant and based in critical pedagogy. Sara holds a Master of Science in Education from the University of Pennsylvania and a Bachelor of Arts in American Studies from Smith College. She also serves as an Attending Teacher for the Pittsburgh Urban Teaching Corps, providing mentorship and coaching to an aspiring second-career teacher.

Mark A. Sulzer, Assistant Professor, University of Cincinnati Mark A. Sulzer is Assistant Professor in the areas of Secondary English Education and Literacy and Second Language Studies in the School of Education at the University of Cincinnati. His research and teaching focus on young adult literature, critical literacies, critical youth studies, and dialogic teaching. His research has been published in journals including *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, *English Journal*, *Journal of Language and Literacy Education*, and *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*.

Amanda Haertling Thein, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Graduate Programs and Professor of Language, Literacy, and Culture, University of Iowa Amanda Haertling Thein is Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Graduate Programs, and Professor of Language, Literacy, and Culture in the University of Iowa's College of Education. Her research focuses on socio-cultural and socio-emotional aspects of literary response, critical approaches to multicultural literature instruction, and the intersection of critical youth studies and young adult literature. Her research has been published in journals including *Research in the Teaching of English*, *Journal of Literacy Research*, *Language Arts* and *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*. She is co-editor of *English Teaching: Practice and Critique* and co-author of four books, including *Teaching to Exceed the English Language Arts Common Core State Standards*.

Francisco L. Torres, PhD Candidate, University of Colorado Boulder Francisco L. Torres is a doctoral candidate in Literacy Studies at the University of Colorado Boulder. He has devoted his professional life to supporting in and out of school educational spaces to be more responsive to the lives and language of Latinx children and youth. He has also sought to center the political work that children engage in to disrupt notions of youth as apolitical and to think about diverse ways of combating injustice. His work with children is fueled by his own experiences as a Puerto Rican child navigating schools and wishing his own experiences were better represented and supported in classrooms.

Roberta Seelinger Trites, Distinguished Professor of English, Illinois State University Roberta Seelinger Trites serves as Distinguished Professor

of English at Illinois State University, where she has taught children's and adolescent literature since 1991. She is the author of such works as *Waking Sleeping Beauty: Feminist Voices in Children's Literature* (1997), *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature* (2000), and *Twenty-First Century Feminisms in Children's and Adolescent Literature* (2018).

Emily Wender, Associate Professor of English, Indiana University of Pennsylvania Emily Wender is Associate Professor of English at Indiana University of Pennsylvania where she teaches in the English Education program. Her primary research interests include close reading instruction and socio-emotional responses to literature; social justice dispositions in pre-service teachers and adolescents; the critical teaching of young adult literature; and the development of undergraduate writers. Her published work has appeared in *English Journal*, *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, *The ALAN Review*, *Journal of Writing Assessment*, and *Teaching English in the Two Year College*, among others.

Index

- #BlackLivesMatter 6, 43, 122–131, 142, 145, 147, 149–150
 #MeToo 42–43, 150
 #NoDAPL 68, 150
 #SayHerName 6, 122–131, 147
 #takeaknee 145, 147
 #TimesUp 42–43
 #WeNeedDiverseBooks 1, 43
The 57 Bus 100
- Abawi, Atia 30
 Abdel-Fattah, Randa 72, 119
 ability *see* disability
 ableism 37
 Adeyemi, Tomi 182, 187–188
 afrofuturism 8, 180–190
 afrofuturistic *see* afrofuturism
Akata Witch 8, 180–190
 Albertalli, Becky 5, 103–112
All American Boys 6, 129, 132–141
All-New, All-Different Avengers Vol. 17, 162–170
 Alphona, Adrian 164, 169
American Born Chinese 4–5, 51, 74–82
American Dream 2, 11–21, 118
Americanized: Rebel without a Green Card 120
American Street 2, 11–21
Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe 72, 178
The Arrival 20
Asking for it 81
The Astonishing Color of After 72
- Barakat, Ibtisam 80–81
 Bausum, Ann 20
Beauty queens 40
 Bendis, Brian Michael 164, 169
Black Panther 162, 164, 182–183, 188
 border(s) 4, 54, 57, 59–60, 63–73, 113
 borderlands 4, 63–73
 Bowman, Akemi Dawn 61
 Bray, Libba 40
 Brezenoff, Steve 5, 91, 93–102
Brooklyn, Burning 5, 91, 93–102
 Butler, Octavia E. 182, 187, 189
- challenges for teachers and teaching 1, 8, 87, 146, 191–196
Children of Blood and Bone 182, 187–188
 class *see* social class
 Colbert, Brandy 53–62
 colonial(ism) 64, 67–68, 74, 164, 181–182, 185–186, 189; *see also* postcolonial(ism)
The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to his White Mother 61
 Copeland, Misty 161
Copper Sun 6, 122–131
 critical comparative content analysis 7, 153–161
 critical language awareness 7, 142–152
 critical language pedagogies 7, 142–152
 critical literacy 67, 113
 critical media literacy 42, 67
 critical pedagogy(ies) 1, 2, 23, 25, 115, 187–188, 193–194

- critical race (theory) 6–7, 40–41, 132–141, 184
- critical theories of race *see* critical race (theory)
- Crutcher, Kathy 129
- Dakota Access Pipeline *see* #NoDAPL
- Daniels, April 110–111
- The Day Tajon Got Shot* 129
- Dear Martin* 129, 139
- Denied, Detained, Deported: Stories from the Dark Side of American Immigration* 20
- disability 1, 3, 32–41, 60, 150, 184
- discomfort 1, 23, 91, 125, 134, 138, 176, 193–194
- drama 3, 12–13, 16–20, 22–31
- Draper, Sharon 6, 30, 122–131
- Dreadnought* 110, 111
- Durrow, Heidi W. 61
- Enchanted Air: A Memoir* 60
- Endangered* 40
- Engle, Margarita 60
- Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with his Mother* 160
- Enrique's Journey: The True Story of a Boy Determined to Reunite with his Mother* 160
- ethnic *see* ethnicity
- ethnicity 1, 24, 40–41, 53–56, 58, 60, 79, 98–99, 174–175, 178
- Every Day* 100
- family 11–15, 18–19, 22, 30, 35–38, 40–41, 43–45, 50, 58–59, 61, 76, 78–81, 85–88, 91, 95–96, 98–99, 104–105, 107, 113, 117–120, 129, 134, 147–148, 154, 156, 159, 161, 176, 178, 180
- Farizan, Sara 91
- Farrish, Terry 120
- Flygirl* 40
- Full Cicada Moon* 61
- Gabi, A Girl in Pieces* 40
- Gansworth, Eric 4, 63–73
- Garvin, Jeff 100
- gay *see* LGBTQ; sexual orientation
- gender 1, 3–5, 7, 8, 33–35, 37, 39, 42–52, 54, 57, 61, 67, 74–75, 80–81, 83, 88, 93–112, 125, 128, 146–149, 153, 171–179; *see also* LGBTQ; sexual orientation
- Gephart, Donna 92
- Ghost Boys* 129, 139
- The Girl who Fell From the Sky* 61
- The Good Braider* 120
- Guerrero, Diane 120
- Hall, Todrick 6, 132, 135, 137
- happiness 5, 83–92
- Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* 181, 185, 186–187, 189
- The Hate U Give* 7, 73, 129, 139, 142–152
- heterosexism 37, 171–176
- Hilton, Marilyn 61
- Hinds, Gareth 30
- homophobia 5, 83–86, 88, 91, 94, 98, 138
- Honestly Ben* 111
- How It Went Down* 129, 150
- I Am Alfonso Jones* 129, 139
- I Am Malala* 7, 153–161
- identity(ies) 1, 3–6, 8, 11, 22, 37, 41, 43–44, 47–49, 53–63, 69, 72, 75–79, 93–121, 148–149, 171–180, 194
- ideology(ies) 3, 5, 7, 32–34, 39–40, 110, 122, 142–153, 163, 188
- If I Ever Get Out of Here* 4, 63–73
- If You Could Be Mine* 91
- immigrant *see* immigration
- immigration 1–3, 11–21, 58, 63, 67, 72, 113–121, 160
- Inside Out and Back Again* 6, 113–121
- intersection(al)ity 1, 4, 8, 40, 43, 54, 57, 83, 93–94, 96, 98–101, 107–110, 171–179
- Jennings, John 129, 139
- Juliet Takes a Breath* 92
- Kadohata, Cynthia 40
- Kiely, Brendan 6, 129, 132–141
- Konigsberg, Bill 111

- Lai, Thanhha 6, 113–121
 language 13–14, 22, 24–25, 27–28, 45, 54–55, 70, 72, 74–76, 79, 119, 142–152, 155, 167, 176, 184
 Laskin, Pamela L. 30
 lesbian *see* LGBTQ; sexual orientation
 Levithan, David 100
 LGBTQ 1, 8, 23, 75, 83–112, 150, 174–175, 178; *see also* gender; sexual orientation
Life in Motion: An Unlikely Ballerina 161
Life in Motion: An Unlikely Ballerina Young Readers Edition 161
Lily and Dunkin 92
The Lines We Cross 72, 119
Little & Lion 4, 53–62
Luna 51

 magical realism 8, 171–179
 Magoon, Kekla 129, 150
Marcelo in the Real World 3, 32–41
 McBride, James 61
 McLemore, Anna-Marie 8, 171–179
 media 6, 32–33, 39, 42, 51, 67–68, 77, 79, 123, 128, 132–133, 147, 149–150, 166, 172, 177
 Medina, Meg 3, 42–52
 Medina, Tony 129, 139
 mental health 59–61, 71, 83, 92
Mexican Whiteboy 61
More Happy than Not 5, 83–92, 110, 112
 Moroz, Erica 120
Ms. Marvel: No Normal 164–165, 169
 multiracial 4, 30, 53–62, 72, 172
My Family Divided: One Girl's Journey of Home, Loss, and Hope 120

 navigational identity 6, 113–121
 Nazario, Sonia 160
 neoliberal(ism) 3, 32–41, 99
 news media *see* media

 Okorafor, Nnedi 8, 180–190
 O'Neill, Louise 81
Openly Straight 111
Out of Darkness 3, 22–31
Outside Beauty 40

 Palacio, R. J. 51
 Pan, Emily X. R. 72
Patternmaster 189
 Peña, Matt de la 61, 180, 189
 Pérez, Ashley Hope 3, 22–31
 Perkins, Mitali 120
 Peters, Julie Anne 51
 Pichelli, Sara 164, 169
Piecing Me Together 139
 police brutality 6, 122–131, 132–141, 147, 149
 political *see* politics
 politics 2, 4–5, 7, 11, 22–23, 30, 32, 37, 54, 63, 67–68, 77, 94, 100, 113, 115, 137, 142, 145–146, 153–161, 162–170, 180, 188, 194
 positioning theory 2–3, 11–21
 postcolonial(ism) 55, 75, 114; *see also* colonial(ism)

 queer(ness) 5–6, 40, 56, 79, 83–112, 135; *see also* LGBTQ; sexual orientation
 Quintero, Isabel 40

 race 1, 3–8, 11, 24, 33–35, 37, 39–42, 51, 53–64, 74–92, 94, 98–100, 108, 110, 128, 132–141, 142–153, 161–171, 174–175, 194
 racial(ized) *see* race
 racial melancholia 4, 74–82
 racism 3–5, 7, 22–31, 33, 37, 59, 74–80, 84, 94, 122, 124, 132–134, 139, 142–152, 154, 162–163, 166, 168, 182, 194
 rape *see* sexual assault
 refugee *see* immigration
 religion 4, 38, 54, 58, 60, 69–70, 107–108, 160, 167
 Reynolds, Jason 6, 129, 132–141
 Rhodes, Jewell Parker 129, 139
 Rivera, Gabby 92
 Robinson, Stacy 129, 139
Romeo and Juliet 30
Romiette and Julio 30
Ronit and Jamil 30
 Ross, Alex 162–170
 Rowling, J. K. 185, 189

 Saedi, Sara 120
 Sáenz, Benjamin Alire 30, 72, 178

- Sammy and Juliana in Hollywood* 30
 Schreier, Eliot 40
The Secret Sky 30
 settler colonialism *see* colonialism
 sexism 3, 22–31, 37, 40, 143–144, 124, 126, 128, 168
 sexual abuse *see* sexual assault
 sexual assault 22–23, 81, 124, 126, 128, 178
 sexual orientation 1, 4–5, 8, 24, 40, 54, 57–60, 67, 71–72, 74, 83–112, 173–175, 178; *see also* gender; LGBTQ
 Silvera, Adam 5, 83–92, 110, 112
Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda 5–6, 103–112
 Slater, Danika 100
 Smith, Sherri L. 40
 social class 1, 3, 5, 7, 11, 15–16, 19–20, 33, 35, 37–40, 43–44, 54, 57–59, 63–64, 72, 81, 83–84, 91, 94, 98–100, 107, 109–110, 143–144, 148–149, 153, 157, 161–162, 174–175
 social justice 2, 5–8, 13, 19–20, 24, 30, 37, 39, 43, 67, 74, 83–84, 88, 91, 93–94, 122, 128, 137–138, 145–146, 150, 163, 167–168, 180, 183, 186–188, 191
 social media 42, 81, 104, 145, 147, 149–150
 social mind 3, 22–31, 83
 sovereignty 4, 64, 67–68
 speculative fiction 181
Starfish 61
 Stone, Nic 129, 139
 Stork, Francisco X. 3, 32–41
Straight Outta Oz 6
The Strange and Beautiful Sorrows of Ava Lavender 177–178
Strange the Dreamer 178
Symptoms of Being Human 100
 Tan, Shaun 20
Tasting the Sky: A Palestinian Childhood 80–81
 Taylor, Laini 178
 Thomas, Angie 73, 129, 139, 142–152
 trans(gender) 1, 8, 51, 88, 92, 94, 98, 110, 171–172, 174, 177, 184; *see also* LGBTQ; sexual orientation
Ultimate Comics Spiderman 164, 169
 unhappiness *see* happiness
 violence 3, 6–7, 22–23, 30, 44–45, 63, 65, 76–77, 87–88, 99–100, 122–131, 138–139, 153–161, 181, 194–195
 Waid, Mark 7, 162–170
 Walton, Leslye 177–178
 Watson, Renée 139
When the Moon Was Ours 8, 171–179
 Whiteness 4, 71, 74–77, 80, 94, 134–135, 163, 167, 171
 Wilson, G. W. 164, 169
Wonder 51
 Yang, Gene Luen 4–5, 51, 74–82, 180, 189
Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass 3, 42–52
You Bring the Distant Near 120
 Yousafzai, Malala 5, 153–161
 youth lens (or critique on perceptions of adolescence) 46
 YouTube 6, 77, 132
 Zobo, Ibi 2, 11–21